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# **REBIRTH EXPLAINED**

**V F GUNARATNA**

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# REBIRTH EXPLAINED

By

V. F. GUNARATNA

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## FOREWORD

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The Buddhist Doctrine of Rebirth which should be differentiated from the Hindu view of Reincarnation is the favourite subject of Mr. V. F. Gunaratna, the learned writer of this small but profound treatise.

As an ideal and practising Buddhist he writes and talks on this important subject with firm conviction.

He has explained in these few pages very clearly almost all the intricate points connected with the subject.

In this book the writer solves all difficult problems from a Buddhist standpoint and satisfactorily answers many other relevant questions.

*Sgd.*  
**Narada.**

29.4.70.



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## CHAPTER I.

# THE LAW OF CHANGE

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is not so much to prove rebirth as to place before the reader certain facts, certain serious considerations and certain reasonable lines of thought which will help him to appreciate the Buddhist point of view regarding the doctrine of rebirth and also to understand how the phenomenon of rebirth works. "This huge world of life and motion which is always becoming, always changing, has yet a law at the centre of it" says Radakrishnan. This central law is Dharma and to the Buddhist it manifests itself in many ways as certain fundamental universal laws on the operation of which the phenomenon of rebirth works. It is therefore fitting to start with an examination of some of these laws. When these are referred to as laws it must not be taken to mean that they are promulgated by some governing body or that they are a man-made code. They are natural laws or principles in the sense that they indicate a constant way of action regarding men and matters as well as events and things of this world. The Buddha did not make them but only discovered them and proclaimed them to the world.

### LAW OF CHANGE

The first fundamental law or principle that should be examined in order to appreciate rebirth is the **Law of Change (Anicca)**. It postulates that **nothing in this world is**



**permanent or static. In other words, everything is subject to change.** Trees and creepers, flowers and fruits, goods and other belongings, buildings and lands, men and animals—in short everything imaginable is subject to this ceaseless universal Law of Change. In some cases this change takes place visibly and within a short space of time, while in other cases it takes place so gradually and slowly that the process of change is not visible at all. To this latter category belong not only rivers and mountains but even the sun, moon and stars where the process of change, as science avers, extends through millions of years. Indeed the various operations of the cosmos in their totality is one continuous change.

What is this change? It has various aspects and manifests itself in various ways. Growth and decay, rise and fall, increase and decrease, integration and disintegration, extension and contraction, unification and diversification, modification and amplification, progression and retrogression are some common aspects of change. Whatever the aspect of change, the changing from one condition or state to another is the essence of all changes and this changing is an unfailing feature of all things. Change rules the world. There is no stability or permanency anywhere. Time moves everything. Time moves us also whether we like it or not. We live in a changing world while we ourselves are all the while changing. This is the relentless law. “*Sabbe sankharā aniccā*”—“all compounded things are impermanent”

An important feature about this Law of Change is that **though everything is subject to change, nothing is ever lost or destroyed. Only its form is changed.** Thus solids may change into liquids and liquids into gases but none of them is ever completely lost. Matter is an expression of energy, and as such it can never be lost or destroyed according to a



principle of Science also called a law - the law of conservation of energy. The student of physiology knows that the human body is constantly undergoing a change and that at the end of every seven years it becomes a new body with every part, skin and bone, hair and nails, completely renewed.

Even at death no part of the body is destroyed. Again only the form is changed. Fluids and gases, minerals and salts are some of the forms into which the various parts of the dead body change according to the nature of the part concerned. While physiology teaches that the human body changes every seven years, the Buddha goes further and states that the human body is undergoing an invisible change every moment of its existence. This particular process of change is known as "*khanika Marana*" (momentary death). Consider seriously the great marvel of a child changing into a young man and the equally great marvel of a young man changing into an old man. How different the young man is from the child and yet the young man can recall his childhood. So also the old man can recall his youth. The seeming identity of this individual is the continuity of an ever-changing process.

Another important feature of the Law of Change is that **there is no distinct and separate line of demarcation between one condition or state and the succeeding condition or state.** These conditions or states are not in water-tight compartments. Each merges into the next. Consider the waves of the ocean with their rise and fall. Each rising wave falls to give rise to another wave which also rises and falls to give rise to yet another such wave. Can anyone point his finger to any one point or position in any one wave and say that there ends one wave and there begins another? Each wave merges into the next. There is no boundary line between



one wave and the next. So is it with all changing conditions in this world. As Professor Rhys Davids in his American lectures has said. "In every case, as soon as there is a beginning there begins also at the same moment to be an ending". Thus this changing is a continuous process, a flux or a flow — an idea which is in perfect accord with modern scientific thought. This leads us to two other fundamental laws which will be examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LAWS OF BECOMING AND CONTINUITY

Two other fundamental laws or principles that should be examined in order to appreciate rebirth are the laws of Becoming and Continuity. We have just considered that the Law of Change indicates a changing process in all things. A changing process would mean that **everything is in the process of becoming something else**. This in short is the Law of Becoming (Bhava). While the Law of Change states that nothing is permanent but is always changing, the Law of Becoming states that everything is every moment in the process of becoming another thing. The Law of Becoming is thus a corollary to the Law of Change.

A seed is every moment in the process of becoming a plant and a plant is every moment in the process of becoming a tree. A bud is every moment in the process of becoming a flower while an infant is every moment in the process of becoming a youth and then an old man. **At no point of time is anything not in the process of becoming something else**. A ceaseless becoming is the feature of all things. It is the ever present feature underlying all changes.



In a sense becoming is the only process in the world since everything is in the process of becoming another thing. Nothing is static. Everything is dynamic. The Law of Becoming can therefore be stated in another way - **Nothing is, everything is becoming.** One may ask - "Suppose a seed is not planted or a plant is uprooted can you still maintain that the seed is in the process of becoming a plant and a plant is in the process of becoming a tree?" By no means, but the process of changing does not end. It continues, but in another direction—in the direction of decay and disintegration. Both seed and plant gradually change and decay and are absorbed into the elements, and as such they too are not destroyed or lost. They too continue to exist. This leads us to a consideration of the idea of continuity which is another law.

## **LAW OF CONTINUITY**

Dependent on the Law of Becoming is the Law of Continuity. Becoming leads to Continuity and therefore the Law of Continuity is a corollary to the Law of Becoming. We have already considered that the Law of Change can only change matter but not destroy it, and had remarked that solids may change into liquids, and liquids into gases but that none of them is ever completely destroyed. The particular energies of which they are an expression continue while their forms alone are changed. Viewed in this light, continuity is also an unfailing feature of all things. **It is because there is continuity that one does not see an exact line of demarcation between one condition or state and the next.**

There is also no time-gap between the two.

**Even time is continuous.** The grammarian may speak



of the past tense, present tense and the future tense as if they exist in water-tight compartments, but in reality there are no sharp dividing lines between present past and future. The moment you think of the present it has glided into the past. Your friend asks you what the time is. You look at your wristlet. It points to 9 a.m. and you tell your friend "It is 9 a.m." But quite strictly and accurately is it so ? It is not 9 a.m. when you answer him. It will be even a fraction of a second past 9 a.m. Time never stays. The present is always gliding into the past. The future is always advancing to the present. Time also is governed by the Law of Continuity.

If within our knowledge most things have had a present a past and a future showing a continuous process, can man alone stand amid these moving processes without a past and without a future? Why should the fundamental universal all-powerful Laws of Change, Becoming, and Continuity suddenly stop operating and come to a dead halt in respect of man only, when he dies? Cannot man also be a part of a continuous process and death be the temporary end of a temporary phenomenon? Cannot Death be just another instance of change and open the door to another condition or state for the dying man? These are matters that have to be seriously considered, before rejecting the doctrine of rebirth hastily and without much thought.

### CHAPTER III.

## THE LAW OF ACTION AND REACTION

The Law of Action and Reaction is another fundamental law or principle that should be examined in order to appreciate rebirth. This law postulates that for every



action there must be a result or reaction. This principle of a result flowing from an action applies to every field of action whether that action is caused by nature or by man. It is an universal law and applies to the physical world as well as the mental world. This law is also called the Law of Cause and Effect. When this law has reference to the actions of human beings it is called the Law of Kamma and it is in this sense that we have to consider it here. The word "*Kamma*" literally means "*actions*" but is very often used to denote the result of an action for which the more correct word would be "*Kamma Vipāka*".

It is the Law of Kamma that governs the results of actions performed by man and the principle underlying the nature of the results that follow, is indicated by the following words: "Yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ" "as he sows, so does he reap". Thus the Law of Kamma sees to it that good deeds beget good results and that bad deeds beget bad results. Its operations are characterized by perfect justice, since Kamma is a strict accountant. Therefore each man gets his exact deserts, not more not less.

If Kamma operates with such unerring precision the question can rightly be asked why some doers of good deeds die without reaping the good results they are entitled to and why some doers of bad deeds die without suffering for their bad deeds. Such situations can make one loose faith in the justice of the Law of Kamma. There are many other anomalies in life that similarly need an explanation. The unequal distribution of joy and sorrow, of wealth and poverty, of health and disease among men in this world are some of them. It is only when we imagine that the time of operation of this law is confined within the narrow limits of this one life that these situations appear to be anomalies. If on the other-hand we postulate a past life and a future



life, then there are complete explanations for all these situations. The actions of a past life can produce results in this life and the actions of this life can similarly produce results in the next. This accounts for the inequalities among men in the present life. In the Majjhima Nikāya (Sutta No. 135) the Buddha has said:—“Actions (Kamma) are one’s very own; actions are one’s inheritance; actions are one’s source of origin; actions are one’s kith and kin; actions are one’s support; actions divide beings, that is to say, into lowness and excellence.”

As regards variations in the time of materialization of results, it is common knowledge that in all fields of action there are immediate results and delayed results. Results do not always arise in the order in which their causative actions have taken place. Many extraneous factors can arise to disturb that order. Similarly in the field of human actions, results do not always follow a principle of “first come first serve” for very good reasons. The Law of Kamma operates in so many ways and the varieties of Kamma are so many that the process of Kammic operations becomes intricate and only a very brief reference to it is possible here.

Although it is popularly supposed that by the Law of Kamma an action is followed by its result, it should be known that other causative factors also come into play and often it is their combined effect that determines the result. A single cause cannot produce a result, much less many results nor can many causes produce just one result. This theory of multiple causes and multiple results has been referred to in the Visuddhi Magga (Chapter XVII):—“Not from a single cause will arise one fruit or many, nor from many causes will arise a single fruit”. (Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thero’s translation). Thus several causes must combine to produce a result. Some of these combining causes can



strengthen and expedite the result (Upatthambaka Kamma) while some can obstruct and delay it (Upapīlaka Kamma) and yet others can completely nullify it (Ahosi Kamma). When there is an interaction and interplay of opposing Kamma sometimes the resulting balance of Kamma determines the nature of the result. Sometimes the superior Kamma takes precedence. The order of precedence is as follows.—

1. Garuka Kamma (*Weighty Kamma*)
2. Āsanna Kamma (*Death - proximate Kamma or Terminal Kamma*)
3. Āciṇṇa Kamma (*Habitual Kamma*)
4. Kaṭattā Kamma (*Miscellaneous Reserve Kamma*)

(This last refers to Kamma which does not fall within any of the foregoing categories.)

It is by having recourse to the presumption of rebirth that all the seeming anomalies and inequalities of life can be explained. Attempts have been made by those who do not subscribe to the belief in rebirth to explain these anomalies in other ways. These attempts either do not bear logical analysis or are based on a much more difficult presumption than rebirth. The presumption of rebirth is the most reasonable and justifiable presumption that the finite human mind can make to explain the seeming anomalies and inequalities of life.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LAW OF ATTRACTION

One other fundamental Law or principle that should be examined in order to appreciate rebirth is the Law of



**Attraction.** The operation of this law is based on the principle of “like attracts like”. There is a tendency for forces of the same type to be attracted to each other. Hence this Law is also called the Law of Affinity. It is known that an atom of a particular strength and quality of vibration will attract to itself another atom whose vibrations harmonize with its own. Two wireless telegraphic instruments will receive and transmit messages from one another only if they are similarly attuned.

This law operates not only in the world of inanimate forces but even in the world of animate life. The saying “birds of a feather flock together” indicates this tendency. Not only birds but even other types of animals are seen to congregate with those of their own special type. When we come to human beings it is common knowledge that men of similar leanings and tendencies are attracted to each other. The many clubs and associations whose members are interested in the same type of study or hobby or games is evidence of this tendency. The Buddha has referred to this tendency thus :— “Beings of low states flow together, meet together with those of low states. Beings of virtuous states flow together, meet together with those of virtuous states. So have they done in the past. So will they do in the future. So do they now in the present” (Samyutta Nikāya-Nidāna Vagga). Mental telepathy is yet another instance of the operation of the Law of Attraction.

In regard to the world of human beings, there is a very special aspect of this Law of Attraction which does not operate in any other field. Man not only attracts to himself others of similar leanings and tendencies but is often able to attract to himself the very things he strongly likes or the very conditions and situations he strongly desires. This special power



to attract material things and conditions is peculiar to man only. Does it not sometimes happen that just when we are longing and urgently needing to find the address of a friend which we have lost years ago, we unexpectedly come across it in a place where we least expect to find it? Does it not sometimes happen that a student urgently needing a book which is out of print and not easily procurable suddenly comes across it in a wayside bookstall? One may say this is chance. May be, but can it not also happen otherwise? Is chance the only explanation? Is chance an explanation after all? There is a cause for everything and when the cause is unknown or unknowable this convenient word is trotted out.

The examples just mentioned may also be due to the fact that there is some strong attractive force or power in our desire-vibrations which makes it possible for those desires to materialize and find their objectives. Strong and persistent desires are able to radiate vibrations far and wide and reach the very thing or the very conditions desired. Distance is no bar as this is not a case of physical travelling. It is not physical things only that travel. All this is possible because of the tremendous power of the mind. The very first stanza of the Dhammapada declares :— “*Manō pubban-gamā dhammā manō setthā mano mayā* — mind is the forerunner of all conditions, mind is supreme, mind-made is everything”. Further in the *Sagātha Vagga* (*Devatā Samyutta*) of the *Samyutta Nikaya* the Buddha has said:—

“Tis by the mind the world is led. ‘Tis by the mind the world is drawn. The mind it is, above all other things that bringeth everything within its sway”. The reason why more often than not desires fail to materialize is either because more often than not they do not reach that very high degree of intensity and persistence necessary for their



materialization or because more powerful counter-vibrations emanating from other sources are at work. Powerful and persistent concentration on the same desire generates an overwhelmingly attractive force and apart from its cumulative effect it has also the further effect of influencing the subconscious mind where this power of attraction can develop in strength and exert its influence over the conscious mind. One can desire consciously as well as subconsciously. The subconscious motivations springing from desire are more powerful than the conscious motivations.

W. W. Atkinson, that inspiring writer, uses the expression "thought-magnet" precisely because thoughts possess this great power of attractions. He says:—

"Each idea, desire and feeling exerts its attractive power in the direction of drawing to itself other things to serve itself. All this refers to the inner workings of thought - attraction ..... This attractive power operates gradually and more or less slowly at first, but like the snowball or the growing crystal, its rate of growth increases with its size."

*("Thoughts are Things")*

The reader may wonder what all this has to do with rebirth. The relevance will presently be seen. Buddhism teaches that the most powerful motivating force in the world of beings is desire or craving. It is called *Taṇhā*, Many and varied desires spring from this basic *Taṇhā*. However there are three special aspects of this *Taṇhā* or craving one of which is *Bhava Taṇhā* or craving for existence. It is not generally realized how comprehensive and widespread this type of craving is in regard to the life and actions of man. It underlies almost all the manifold activities of man who is nearly every moment of his life moved by it consciously and, more often than not, subconsciously. The desire to be,



the desire to live on, is the fountain source of all other desires. It is the unseen undercurrent driving man to action whatever the nature of that action may be.

How can it be otherwise? Just consider. We earn, we eat, we dress not because we desire to die, but, fundamentally, because we desire to live. We love, we hate, not because we desire to die, but, fundamentally, because we desire to live. We struggle, we plot, we plan for precisely the same reason. We utter falsehoods, we commit crimes not because we desire to die but, fundamentally, because we desire to live. Even the act of suicide, paradoxical as it may seem, springs fundamentally from a desire to live - to live a life free from difficulties and troubles, free from obstacles and disappointments.

It should now be obvious that this craving for existence looms large in the mind of man consciously as well as unconsciously. Craving, like any other thought is an expression of energy and as such it cannot be lost or destroyed. This powerful and persistent craving is a powerful and persistent expression of energy and cannot die with the dying man. On the contrary, at the moment of death, by reason of the operation of the Law of Attraction (life being more or less a series of conscious and unconscious cravings for existence) the accumulated energies resulting from this powerful and persistent desire or craving for existence, will be the means of attracting to this dying man the very conditions necessary for another existence. Thus the craving for existence makes him re-exist. **The will-to-live makes him re-live. He then mentally grasps another existence.** This grasping has been dealt with much force by a Western writer M.O.C. Walshe in a book entitled "Buddhism for today":—

"At the moment of death the higher mental functions



cease, and the unconscious patterns caused by past Kamma come to the surface. Chief of them is the force of craving. **Taṇhā**.....Dependent on the enormous force of this **Taṇhā**, there is an instinctive **grasping** at a new physical base, a new conception takes place and a fresh life is started..... Is this in principle so difficult to understand? A dying person normally fights for his life as long as his existing body is able to stand the strain. How could this terribly strong urge be simply dissipated at death? We know that in the faculty of telepathy the mind seems to “leap” from one body to another in some sense. If we accept that that is possible, as we must, then we can perhaps form an idea of how the “mental leap” at death takes place.”

In this connection it should be mentioned that the Buddha on one occasion while answering a question put to him by a wondering ascetic called Vaccha as to what exactly causes one life to link with the next at the moment of death, referred to that powerful force called **Upādāna** which means “grasping”, and explained that at the moment of death **Taṇhā** or Craving becomes this grasping force (**upādāna**). The Buddha has stated this very succinctly but emphatically:— “At the time, Vaccha, when a being lays aside this body, and rises up again in another body, for that I declare **Taṇhā** (craving) to be the grasping force (**Upādāna**). Indeed, Vaccha, on that occasion **Taṇhā** (craving) becomes the grasping force (**Upādāna**)” (*Samyutta Nikāya* IV. 398).

Here then is a pointed reference to what happens at the moment of death. Thus the craving for existence (**Taṇhā**) which is most powerful at the moment of death (even though the dying man may be consciously inactive) becomes a powerful grasping force (**Upādāna**) and it is this grasping force that grasps the opportunity for re-existence which his



craving has attracted. Upādāna is an intensified form of Taṇhā. Its grasping and clinging power is overwhelming.

Consider the case of a man who has fallen from the deck of a ship on the high seas at midnight unknown to others. He struggles with the devouring waves. Frantically he would clutch at anything, even a passing straw. However by reason of his powerful and persistent cries, he attracts to himself a rope that has been flung towards him by the men in the ship. How tenaciously will not this drowning man struggling for his breath and his life, **grasp** that rope and eventually reach the ship for a further lease of life? Greater, far greater, is the tenacity of that **mental grasp** (Upādāna of any dying man struggling for his last breath when the powerful and persistent energies resulting from the totality of his powerful and persistent cravings for existence have attracted to him the opportunity for further existence which he most tenaciously grasps. This opportunity and this grasping are purely mental phenomena. They will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Indeed life is a series of cravings. The accumulated cravings for existence added to the powerful craving at the moment of death attract to the dying man a further existence. Indeed, the will-to-live makes man re-live.

Hence it is that a part of the all-comprehensive formula of the chain of Dependent Origination or casual connections (Paticca samuppāda) runs as follows:—

Taṇhā paccayā Upādānaṃ  
(Dependent on Craving, arises Grasping )  
Upādāna pāccayā Bhavo  
(Dependent on Grasping, arises Becoming  
Bhava paccayā Jāti  
(Dependent on Becoming arises Rebirth)



## CHAPTER V

### MIND AND THE LAW OF CHANGE

In the very first chapter we considered how the body is subject to the Law of Change. It is necessary now to consider how mind also like the body is subject to the same Law. Mind is not something physical. It is not something located in the brain as was erroneously supposed by certain schools of thought in the past. The mind is not in the brain nor is the brain in the mind. According to Buddhist psychology mind is nothing but a constant stream or flow of thoughts. Thought is just mind in operation or mind in motion just as wind is air in motion. Thought is an expression of energy and therefore the mind like thought cannot be lost or destroyed but is subject to change. The mind changes from moment to moment. One moment it is one thought that engages the mind and the next moment it is another. This process of thought following thought is continually taking place. The mind is thus nothing but an endless succession of thoughts. It is not a unity but a continuity. It is not permanent or static. It is a series (santati). It is a flux or flow (sota). It is a stream of successive thoughts which are continually arising and passing away from moment to moment. Each thought is succeeded by another with such a rapidity as to give the mind a semblance of something stable and permanent. A stick burning at one end and turned rapidly round and round in the dark creates the illusion of ring or circle of fire to onlookers at a distance who do not know what is actually happening. In reality however there is no such permanent ring or circle.



It is just the picture of successive burning sticks following each other closely in a rapid circular movement.

So it is with the mind where thoughts succeed each other with a much greater rapidity. Mind has therefore been compared to the flow of water in a river- (*nadī soto viya*), where sheets or currents of water follow each other with such closeness or rapidity that we seem to see a permanent thing called river and are tempted to regard it as such whereas it is clearly not so. The Kelani River of yesterday is not the Kelani River of today. The river you have to cross in the morning to get to your place of work is not the river you recross in the evening after your work is over. It is a different set of waters each day, each hour each moment. So also with the mind. It is a different thought each moment. one thought following the other with such a rapidity of succession that the illusion of a permanent thing called mind is created.

This rapidity of succession of thoughts has been the subject of pointed comment by the Buddha in the Anguttara Nikaya (i.v.):— “Monks, I have not heard of any other single thing so quick to change as the mind in so much that it is no easy thing to illustrate how quick to change it is”. In the commentary Atthasalini it is said:— “While a unit of matter which has arisen persists, sixteen thought - moments arise and break up, and no illustration can convey the shortness of the time they occupy” (P. T. S. Translation pt 1, p 81). In this connection it is important to remember that not only is there a rapidity of succession of thoughts but that there is no boundary line between one thought and another. One thought merges into the other so that the expression “Succession of thoughts” does not quite accurately describe the position. Hence the description by reference



to a river where there is not so much a succession of waters as a flow of waters. That eminent psychologist Professor William James in his "Psychology: Briefer Course" has a whole chapter entitled. "The stream of consciousness." Here he says:- "Consciousness then does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as "chain" or "train" do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed, it flows. A "river" or "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter let us call it the stream of thoughts, of consciousness or of subjective life.*" (The italics are his).

The rapidity of this process whereby continually one thought merges into another not only invests the mind with a seeming identity and a semblance of stability but it also leads one to imagine that there is a mysterious permanent something residing within the mind which performs the mental function of thinking. It requires a little hard thinking to appreciate the view expressed by Professor William James in his "Principles of Psychology" that "the thoughts themselves are the thinkers". In the same chapter referred to above he says:- "If we could say in English "It thinks" as we say "it rains" or "it blows" we should be stating the fact most simply."

This view of the mind as being not a unity but a series of thoughts is held by almost all psychologists of note. For instance, Bertrand Russel in "Religion and Science" says:—

"Until recently scientists believed in an indivisible and indestructible atom. For sufficient reasons physicists have reduced this atom to a series of events; for equally good reasons psychologists find that mind has not the identity of a single continuing thing but is a series of occurrences bound together by certain intimate relations". He also adds — "The question



of immortality therefore has become the question whether these intimate relations exist between occurrences connected with a living body and other occurrences which take place after that body is dead”.

As each thought passes away from the conscious mind it transmits to the subconscious or unconscious all its characteristic energies, impressions and tendencies though one is not aware of this transmission. It is not every mental process that comes within the awareness of the conscious mind. There are many mental processes of which we are not aware. This leads us to a consideration of the sub-conscious and unconscious aspect of the mind together regarded in Buddhist psychology as Bhavanga Citta. As this will be specially dealt with in the next chapter no further reference to it will be made here than to remark that if the impressions of our thoughts are not retained somewhere, it is impossible to explain the very existence of that marvellous faculty of memory whereby one is able to retain and recall at will many events of the past as well as passages of poetry and even prose that one has learnt by heart.

In Chapter 1 we had learnt that the body is a changing process. In this Chapter we have just learned that the mind is also a changing process. Man is a psycho-physical combination, a combination of mind and body. Now we know that it is a combination of a changing mind and a changing body. Mind and body thus viewed as changing processes help us to appreciate the view, rather difficult to comprehend, that we actually live for one moment only, and that the next moment it is another life. Thus the duration of life, in the ultimate sense, is for one moment only. This is sometimes referred to as “the instantaneousness of life”. As vividly pointed out in the Visuddhi Magga (Chapter VIII) a revolving wheel touches the ground at one point only at



any given moment. At the very next moment, the very next point in the wheel touches the very next point in the ground. Similarly we live for one thought-moment only, and the very next moment is really another life because what then functions is another mind with another body, just like another point in the wheel touching another point in the ground. That it is another body that functions at the next moment was explained in the course of Chapter I on the Law of Change where it was stated that the body changes every moment and that there is a living and a dying every moment (Khanika marana).

Continuity of life, however, is maintained in spite of this momentary living and dying because there is not only momentary living and dying, there is also momentary re-living and the re-living is related to the living of the preceding moment by reason of the transmission of impressions and tendencies earlier referred to. This process of one thought or consciousness giving rise to another continues without a break. Even at the end of the present span of life, as will be discussed in another chapter, the dying consciousness will give rise to another consciousness (obviously not in the same body nor in the same place or plane of existence) which succeeding consciousness along with two fresh physical factors (the parental sperm and ovum cells) will combine in some appropriate maternal womb to which it is drawn to form the nucleus of a fresh being. That the succeeding consciousness can arise immeasurable distances away can be regarded as not impossible because in the first place it is not a case of travelling in the physical sense and secondly because the Law of Attraction works in the psychic plane as well where time and distance do not count.

Thus it comes to pass that the change of life from one moment to another in this existence is in essence no different



from the change of life from one existence to another, the difference between death and life being only a thought moment. The first thought-moment in the subsequent life does not originate on its own. It is a sequel to the last thought-moment of the preceding life. It is therefore a continuity in the series of successive thought-moments that constitute the preceding life although in a different plane with a different body. The last conscious thought-moment of the preceding life conditions the first thought-moment of the succeeding life. Both these thoughts take the same "arammana" or object of thought. This will be explained in a subsequent Chapter. Death of the body thus is no bar or hindrance to the continuation of this process of one thought giving rise to another.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE CONSCIOUS MIND AND THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

(Vithi Citta and Bhavanga Citta)

In the last Chapter it was shown that the mind is a changing process. This process manifests itself in two levels or streams - the Vithi Citta or conscious mind and Bhavanga Citta the unconscious or subconscious mind. Western psychologists postulate three streams or levels of mind - the conscious, the sub-conscious, and the unconscious. At the conscious level there is awareness of what one does or says. At the deeper subconscious level, lie concealed all the impressions and memories of thoughts which have left the conscious mind. Many of these impressions can be recalled at will. Some of them on their own can re-enter the



conscious mind. The deepest level is the unconscious, where also there lie concealed past impressions and memories of thoughts which passed through the conscious mind but they can never be recalled at will. On their own they may sometimes reappear in the conscious mind. They can however be drawn out by special methods such as hypnosis.

In Buddhist psychology these three levels are considered under two heads - Vithi Citta and Bhavanga Citta. The conscious level is recognized and referred to as Vithi Citta. The other two levels are together recognized and referred to by one name - Bhavanga Citta. They are not considered as two distinct and separate compartments. Even Western psychology admits that there are no well defined boundaries between the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind, since each merges into the other. Bhavanga Citta is the hidden repository of all impressions and memories of thoughts that pass through the Vithi Citta or conscious mind. All experiences and tendencies are stored up there but from there they sometimes can exert an influence over the conscious mind without the conscious mind being aware of the source of this influence. The Buddhist Bhavanga Citta is not identical with the unconscious of Western Psychology although in very many respects they are similar. Bhavanga Citta is wider in scope than the Western unconscious nor do the Vithi Citta and Bhavanga Citta operate together at the same time, these two states of mind being conditioned by each other.

The state of active consciousness and awareness is generally present during the day when one is awake. It is then conscious of all impacts or impressions continually received from outside through the five senses or of impressions received from within by way of ideas and thoughts or recollections of former thoughts. Therefore when one is awake



the conscious mind is never doing nothing since to be conscious is to be conscious of something whether external or internal. When this Vithi Citta which is thus constantly receiving impressions from within or without subsides into inactivity as for instance during sleep, the other stream, the passive process of the unconscious or subconscious Bhavanga manifests itself. This Bhavanga Citta is also called Vīthi Mutta in the sense that it is freed or released (mutta) from all conscious thought-processes (Vithi). This passive process then begins to flow on like an undisturbed stream so long as the conscious Vīthi Citta does not arise to disturb it. Such a disturbance will occur whenever sleep is disturbed through any of the five sense-channels.

It is not only during sleep that the unconscious Bhavanga Citta manifests itself. When one is awake, every time an arisen thought of the conscious Vithi Citta subsides and before the next thought could arise, within that infinitesimally minute fraction of time, the Bhavanga Citta intervenes. Then when the next thought of the conscious level arises, the unconscious Bhavanga subsides into inactivity. Since innumerable thoughts arise and fall one after another during the day, as innumerable are these momentary interruptions to the flow of the unconscious Bhavanga during the day.

### **Importance of Bhavanga Citta - Its basic position**

In a sense the passive Bhavanga Citta is more important than the conscious Vīthi Citta. Though the Bhavanga Citta is not consciously active, it is sub-consciously active. It is referred to as a state of subliminal activity viz. an activity that takes place below the threshold of the conscious mind, an activity of which therefore there is no awareness to the conscious mind. The conscious Vithi Citta holds only one thought or idea at a time whereas the subconscious or unconscious Bhavanga Citta holds all the impressions



of all the thoughts, ideas and experiences that enter and leave the conscious Vithi Citta. The Bhavanga Citta thus functions as a valuable mental storehouse or reservoir of impressions. Professor William James speaking about the subconscious mind (which is one aspect of the Bhavanga Citta) says "that it is obviously the larger part of us, for it is the abode of everything that is latent and the reservoir of everything that passes recorded and 'unobserved'". (Varieties of Religious Experience).

Another feature of the Bhavanga Citta is that from time to time some of the thoughts, ideas and impressions that lie concealed in it can influence the conscious mind. They can also be drawn out or tapped by the method of hypnosis which will be explained in a later chapter.

The significance of Bhavanga is very necessary for understanding such mental phenomena as memory which is otherwise unintelligible and becomes a complete mystery. In this connection it is useful to consider what Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thero has said in "Karma and Rebirth" (Wheel Publication No. 9):- "The existence of the subconscious life-stream or Bhavangasota is a necessary postulate of our thinking. If whatever we have seen, heard, felt, perceived, thought, externally or internally experienced, and done, if all this without exception, were not registered somewhere and in some way, be it in the extremely complex nervous system, or in the subconscious or unconscious, then we would not even be able to remember what we were thinking the previous moment, and we would not know anything of the existence of other beings and things, would not know our parents, teachers, friends and so on, would even not be able to think at all as thinking is conditioned by the remembrance of former experiences and our mind would be a complete *tabula rasa* and emptier than the actual mind of an



infant just born nay even of the embryo in the mother's womb."

Apart from its function as a mental storehouse of impressions, the unconscious Bhavanga Citta performs a very important function as its etymology connotes. The word "Bhavanga" made up as it is of "Bhava" (existence) and "anga"(factor), indicates that the Bhavanga Citta is the factor or indispensable basis of existence. The commentary Vibhāvinī Tīkā defines it thus:- "Avicchēdappavatti hētu-bhāvena bhavassa angabhāvō bhavangan" - "the factor of life by means of which the flow of existence or being is maintained without a break." This then is the most important function of the Bhavanga Citta. It functions as an indispensable and continuing basis or under-current of existence. In this sense, it is called Bhavanga Sota (stream or flow of Bhavanga). It has also been called "the function of being" and as such it keeps life going. Western writers have aptly called it "Life-continuum".

The Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thero in his "Buddhist Dictionary" states:- "This so called subconscious life-stream or under current of life which certain modern psychologists call the Unconscious or the Soul is that by which might be explained the faculty of memory, the problem of telekinesis, mental and physical growth, Karma and rebirth etc."

Shwe Zan Aung in his Introduction to the "Compendium of Philosophy" gives this helpful description of the Bhavanga Citta or stream of being in respect of its higher function:- "The stream of being then is an indispensable condition or factor, the sine qua non of present conscious existence; it is the *raison d'être* of individual life; it is the life continuum. It is as it were the background on which thought-pictures are drawn. It is comparable to the current of a river when it flows calmly on, unhindered by any obstacle, unruffled by



any wind, unrippled by any wave and neither receiving any tributary waters nor parting with its contents to the world. And when that current is opposed by any obstacle of thought from the world within or perturbed by tributary streams of the senses from the world without then thoughts (Vīthi Citta) arise. But it must not be supposed that the stream of being is a subplane from which thoughts rise to the surface. There is a juxtaposition of momentary states of consciousness subliminal and supraliminal, throughout a lifetime and from existence to existence. But there is no superposition of such states."

## CHAPTER VII

# THOUGHTS, THOUGHT—PROCESSES AND THOUGHT—MOMENTS

In any language certain words and expressions are loosely used more for the sake of convention than precision. Thus we speak of the sun rising and setting though in reality it does not do so. In Chapter V we learnt that the "mind" is not anything permanent and stable whereas that word is loosely used to denote such a state. In this Chapter we shall be learning that the word "thought" like "mind" is also loosely used. As McDougall says in his book on "Psychology" :— "When we come to describe the facts of consciousness we find that the notions and the words in popular use are very inadequate to the work of analytic description."

### What is a thought?

Thought is the consciousness or awareness of anything. The object of thought may be external or internal. There is never a moment when a man is without a thought either



in the conscious or unconscious state. In Buddhist psychology one does not speak of a thought but of a thought-process since thought is not a unity. So what is loosely called a thought is really a thought-process. As Joseph Jestrow the author of "Effective Thinking" says - "Thinking is just a convenient name for a complex group of mental processes."

### **What is a thought-process ?**

We have already learnt that the mind is an endless succession of thoughts each following the next with such a rapidity of succession as to give it the semblance of something permanent and stable, whereas in reality it is not a unity but a process with this difference that it is a limited process - a process of 17 thought-moments each following the other. So that, what we loosely call a thought is a thought-process. When a man sees a tree and instantly recognizes it as a tree, it means that there arose in him an awareness or consciousness of the tree, but this does not arise by one single mental operation. Before this awareness or consciousness or thought of the tree completely arose, 17 stages or thought-moments would have occurred. The man may not be conscious of all these 17 stages or thought-moment, since some of these mental processes especially the earlier processes occur in the Bhavanga or unconscious state of the mind. Although as many as 17 stages or thought-moments are necessary to conclude and complete one single thought-process, it is wrong to imagine that much time is involved in the process. On the contrary in trying to emphasize the extreme shortness of time taken, commentators resort to a comparison with a flash of lightning or a twinkling of the eye. So infinitesimally brief is the period of time involved. What these 17 stages or thought-moments are will be explained in the next-chapter.



## **What is a thought-moment?**

The unit of measure for the duration of a thought-process is a thought-moment, (Cittakhana) which is also an infinitesimally small division of time. All thought-moments, rise up in the conscious Vithi Citta remain there for just a fleeting moment and then sink down to the unconscious Bhavanga Citta, just as waves of the ocean rise up, remain there for a fleeting moment and then subside. Thought-moments therefore have the following three stages: 1) The genetic stage or nascent stage (Uppāda). 2) the continuing stage (Tithi) 3) the cessant stage (Bhanga). These three stages also occur within the shortest possible time. A Thought-moment does not persist by itself but runs most rapidly from the first to the second stage and from the second to third.

## **Thought-moments and Thought-Processes.**

As stated earlier, a thought-process is made up of 17 thought-moments, and a thought-moment is made up of 3 stages. 17 thought-moment must arise, remain and pass away to conclude and complete one single thought-process. When the cessant stage of the 17th thought-moment passes away and before the genetic or nascent stage of the first thought-moment in the next thought-process arises, at this particular juncture, since one thought-process has completed itself, the conscious Vithi Citta subsides and the unconscious Bhavanga Citta re-appears into activity. This unconscious Bhavanga Citta also does not remain long. It too remains for just a fleeting moment and then subsides to enable the next thought-process to arise in the conscious Vithi Citta. This too then runs its course of 17 stages or thought-moments and then the Bhavanga Citta again appears. In this manner the unending stream of mental processes flows on and on.



It is a mistake to think that these various mental states are joined together like carriages of a train to form a somewhat jagged combination. Each mental stage merges completely into the next. There are no sharp dividing lines between one mental stage and the next. Hence there is no sharp dividing line between the nascent stage of one thought-moment and its continuing stage or between its continuing stage and its cessant stage. Similarly there is no sharp dividing line between one thought-process and another. Although the Bhavanga Citta is said to appear when one conscious thought-process is over and before another begins here too there is no sharp dividing line since, as stated in an earlier chapter, Vithi Citta merges into the unconscious Bhavanga there being no sharp dividing lines between the two. Everywhere and under all circumstances each mental stage merges into the next. So also the last conscious mental stage of the dying man merges into the first mental stage of the pre-natal child in the life hereafter, distance being no bar since these are psychic phenomena and not physical phenomena. To be more precise, the resultant of the last conscious mental state of the dying man along with certain physical factors go to form the mind-body of the embryo in the life hereafter. This will be explained in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOW A NORMAL THOUGHT—PROCESS WORKS

In the last Chapter we learnt that what we loosely call a thought is a thought-process and that it consists of 17 stages or thought-moments. In the present chapter it will be shown how a normal thought-process works. The two subsequent



chapters will explain respectively how the thought-process at death works and how the thought-process at birth works.

Let us now trace the interesting course of a single normal thought-process through the 17 stages or thought-moments that constitute it as explained in the commentaries. Here is the order of their occurrence in the normal case.

### ORDER OF A NORMAL THOUGHT - PROCESS

1. Bhavanga atīta (*past Unconscious*)
2. Bhavanga caiana (*vibration of Bhavanga*)
3. Bhavanga upaccheda (*arrest of Bhavanga*)
4. Pañcadvārā vajjana (*five-door advertence*)
5. Pañca-Viññāna (*five fold consciousness*)
6. Sampatīcchana (*reception*)
7. Sañīrana (*investigation*)
8. Votthapana (*decision*)
- 9 - 15. Javana (*thought-impulsions*)
- 16 & 17. Tadālabhāna (*Registration of the experience*)

#### 1st Thought-Moment: Past Unconscious (Bhavanga Atīta)

We must commence tracing from the stage immediately prior to the running of the conscious process. That is the stage when the conscious Vīthi Citta is in abeyance and the stream of the unconscious Bhavanga Citta is flowing undisturbed. Such a state is present for instance, in a man who is enjoying deep sleep, when the mind does not respond to external objects or stimuli. This then is regarded as the first-stage for the purpose of investigation though actually the process has not yet begun. (This first stage is also



present during that brief interval of time when one conscious thought has subsided and before the next arises.)

## **2nd Thought-Moment: Vibration of the Bhavanga (Bhavanga Calana)**

Suppose now an external object or stimulus by way of a sight or sound or other sense-impression (any stimulus that attracts any of the senses) is received by the sleeping man, the flow of the unconscious Bhavanga Citta is disturbed. This is the second thought-moment or stage. It can also arise in the waking state after one conscious thought has subsided and before the next arises. The mind is then in the Bhavanga state for a very short while (**Calana** means shaking or vibrating). The Bhavanga flow now begins to vibrate. This vibration lasts for one thought moment before it subsides and is compared by Shwe Zen Aung the translator of the Abhidhammattha Sangaha (in his Introduction) to the vibration of a spinning top whose velocity is falling. This is the result of the stimulus or object trying to force its attention on the conscious mind by impeding the flow of the Bhavanga stream of unconsciousness.

## **3rd Thought-Moment: Arrest of the Bhavanga (Bhavanga Upaccheda)**

This is the stage when the stream of the Bhavanga Citta is arrested or cut off. (Upaccheda, means cutting off). As a result, the Vīthi Citta or the conscious process arises and begins to flow but this stimulus or object is not yet cognized by it.

## **4th Thought-Moment: Five-door Apprehending Consciousness (Pañcadvārāvajjana)**

This is the stage when a start is made by the conscious Vīthi Citta to cognize the object which has arrested the flow



of the unconscious Bhavanga. This stage is called Pañcadvārāvajjana because there is a turning round to find out through which of the five sense-doors the stimulus is coming ("Pañcadvāra" means five doors and "āvajjana" means turning towards) There is thus an adverting towards the stimulus or object through one of the five sense-channels of sight hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. At this stage the sleeping man just awakened is turning towards something which calls for attention but knows nothing more about it. This is sometimes compared to the action of the spider to find out the cause that disturbed his web. The smooth flowing of the Bhavanga undisturbed by any activity of the Vīthi Citta, is compared to the stillness of the spider resting motionlessly at the centre of his web. When an insect enters the web and is entangled in one of its threads, the web begins to vibrate and thereafter the spider turns to see in which thread something lies entangled. This is exactly the function of this thought-moment of Pañcadvārāvajjana. The sleeping man just awakened from his sleep is trying to find out through which of the five sense-doors the stimulus came. Is it a sight or sound or other sense-impression? He continues to watch. It is still a dim awareness of something. If attention is aroused not externally through the five senses but internally through a thought, the stage is known as Manodvārāvajjana (Mind-Door advertence.) This is alternative to the Five Sense-Door advertence. The course of such a thought-process is slightly different from the process now described since the thought-moments 5th to 8th do not occur.

#### **5th Thought-Moment: Five-fold Consciousness (Pañca Viññāṇa)**

Now follows a consciousness of the kind that apprehends the particular sense-impression caused by the stimulus



“Pañca” means five and “Viññāṇa” means consciousness) If it is a sight it is Cakkhu-Viññāṇa or Visual Consciousness that works. If it is a sound it is Sota-Viññāṇa or Auditory Consciousness that works. In this way in respect of every one of the sense-organs there is a particular sense-consciousness and this sense-consciousness begins to work. Yet there is no full comprehension of the stimulus. **What appears through one of the sensed doors is merely sensed.**

#### **6th Thought-Moment: Sampaticchana (Reception)**

This is the thought-moment which occurs when the sense impression caused by the stimulus is properly received. **What is sensed is now received.** (“Sampaticchana” means receiving)

#### **7th Thought-Moment: Investigation (Santīrana)**

After the function of receiving, there arises the function of investigation. This thought-process performs the function of investigating with discrimination the stimulus or object which caused the sense-impression. **What is received is investigated.** (“Santīrana” means investigation).

#### **8th Thought-Moment: Decision (Votthapana)**

This is the thought-moment when a decision is made regarding the stimulus which caused the sense-impression (“Votthapana” means decision). **What is investigated is decided on or determined.**

#### **9th to 15th Thought Moments: Thought-impulsions (Javana)**

Now follows the psychologically important stage of Javana or apperception or impulsion which lasts for seven thought-moments (at the time of death, only five such moments occur). It is a stage of introspection followed by



action. The psychological importance of these thoughts cannot be over-emphasized. Javana is derived from the Pali verb **Javati** which means to run and also to impel or incite. Hence these mental states unlike the previous mental states run for several thought-moments and their one function is to impel. These are impulses which flash forth at the climax of a process of consciousness of the **Vīthi Citta**. Hence one is now fully conscious of the object or stimulus in all its relations, this being the stage of maximum cognition. **It is at this stage that Kamma begins to operate for good or bad, for this is the stage when the element of free-will is present.** All other stages of the **Vīthi**-process are like reflex actions. They must occur. Javana is the only stage where man is relatively free to think and to decide. There is the element of choice in this important thought-moment and it has the power to affect one's future according to the nature of the volition. If the sense object that entered the mind had been rightly comprehended (**yoniso manasikara**), free from the impurities of lust, hatred and delusion, harmonious results will follow. If it had been wrongly comprehended (**ayoniso manasikara**), disharmonious results will follow. Javana in this context is a difficult word to be rendered into English. Professor Rhys Davids in his Pali Dictionary says that as the 12th stage in the course of an act of the **Vīthi Citta**, Javana means, "going" not by way of swiftness but as intellectual movement. It is the stage of full perception or apperception.

Mrs. Rhys Davids refers to Javana as "the mental aspect or parallel of that moment in the nerve-process when central function is about to become efferent activity or innervation." Innervation being a reference to the nervous influences necessary for the maintenance of life and the functions of the various organs the comparison is not inappropriate.



But she herself has stated that she spent hours on this word and finding no appropriate rendering was content to use the word untranslated. Shew Zan Aung's Introduction to the "Compendium of Philosophy" refers to the Javana stage as follows:- "Now intervenes the apperceptive stage of full cognition, wherein the object, determined or integrated by the foregoing activity is apperceived or properly cognized. This is held to occupy ordinarily seven thought moments or none at all, except in cases of death, stuporaction, creation of phenomena and other special cases when a less number of moments than seven obtains. At this stage of apperception, the subject interprets the sensory impression and fully appreciates the objective significance of his experience".

**16th and 17th Thought-moments: registration of the experience: (Tadālabhava)**

These are the two resultant thought-moments following immediately after the Javana thought-moments. Their only function is to register the impression made by the Javana thought-moments. They are not an integral part of the conscious Vīthi process. They are merely a recall of an experience that is passing away. If the impression made is not strong, they do not occur at all. "Tadalanbana", derived from "Tadārammaṇa" means "that object". It is so called because it takes the same object as that of the foregoing Javana impulses and has been compared in the Visuddhimagga to the current of water that follows for a short while the boat which is going upstream. (Chapter XIV)

### **The 17 Thought-Moments in General**

It must not be forgotten that these seemingly long 17 thought-moments constitute just one single thought-process



which takes place within an infinitesimally small fraction of time. The progress of this process varies with the intensity of the stimulus. If the intensity is very great (atimahanta), the complete process takes place. If it is great (mahanta), the 16th and 17th moments of registration do not occur. If it is small (paritta) or very small (atiparitta) the process works functionally only, without full cognition.

### **The classic simile of a falling mango**

These 17 thought-moments are compared by commentators to the 17 stages that occur between a man sleeping and the selfsame man eating a mango that falls by his side. A man is found sleeping soundly at the foot of a mango tree with his head covered. A wind blows and moves the branches of the tree causing a ripe mango to fall by his side. He is aroused from his sleep by this sound. He sees the fallen mango. He picks it up and examines it. Finding it to be desirable fruit he eats it, and after swallowing the last morsels, he replaces his head covering and resumes his sleep.

The sleep of the man represents the unconscious Bhavanga stream flowing undisturbed. The striking of the wind against the tree represents Atīta Bhavanga or past unconscious. The sleeper is not disturbed. The sleep continues. So does the Bhavanga. The moving of the branches represents the vibration of the Bhavanga. The sleep is disturbed. So is the Bhavanga. The falling of the mango represents the arrest of the Bhavanga. The awakening of the man represents Pañcadvārāvajjana or the arousing of attention through the Five-Door channels of sense. The removal of the head covering and the use of his eyes to observe the mango is Cakkhu Viññāṇa or visual consciousness which is one of the five types of consciousness together known as Pañca



**Viññāṇa.** The picking up of the fruit represents Sampa-Sicchana or reception and the examination of it represents tantirana or investigation. The finding of the fruit as a desirable mango is Votthapana or decision. The eating of the fruit represents the apperceptive acts of the seven Javana thought moments. The swallowing of the last morsels left in the mouth represents Tadālabhāna or registration of the impression. The man's resumption of his sleep after replacing his head covering represents the Bhavanga Citta resuming to flow smoothly and undisturbed.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOW A THOUGHT-PROCESS AT DEATH WORKS.

Now that we have studied how thought-processes work in normal circumstances during life, we should be able to follow without difficulty the next study, namely, the manner in which thought-processes work at the moment of death. Only this understanding will help us to appreciate what follows death in the psychic plane. In no other way can rebirth be understood.

#### Effect of Death on Body

Man is a psycho-physical unit, a mind-body combination (nāma-rūpa). The body and the mind co-exist in a close association with each other like the flower and its scent. The body is like the flower and the mind is like the scent, and death is merely the separation of these two co-existing items. When a man is on the point of dying, his body and mind (nāma-rūpa) are weak. It may be that right up to the point of death he was strong in every way, but at the very



point of death he is weak. This is because from the seventeenth thought-moment reckoned backwards from the point of death no renewed physical functioning occurs. This is just like a motorist releasing the accelerator before stopping, so that no more pulling power is given to the engine. Similarly no more material qualities born of Kamma (Kammaja rūpa) arise while those which have already come into being before the stage of that thought-moment will persist till the time of death-consciousness (*cuti citta*), and then they will cease. As there is no more renewal of material qualities the whole process becomes weaker and weaker. It is like the fading light of an oil lamp when no more oil is found. When the mind-body combination ceases to exist as a combination neither body nor mind is destroyed or annihilated. These combining parts continue separately without a break their respective processes of changing from one condition or state to another, from moment to moment, although the two processes have now parted company. The bodily part (like old clothes once worn but now discarded by the owner) will start a separate process of change—a process of gradual decay (*rupam Jirati* - the body decays) but there is no annihilation. Matter is energy and cannot be lost or destroyed. The constituents of the body, as mentioned in an earlier chapter will change into the elements that composed it, some into air as gases, some into water as fluids and others into earth as minerals. The elements too cannot be destroyed or lost but only their form will change. In this manner the process of change will persist so far as the bodily counterpart of man is concerned.

### **Effect of Death on Mind.**

Now what of the mental counterpart (*nāma*)? The mental counterpart also like the physical counterpart continues without interruption its process of changing from one



condition or state to another though no more in association. with its physical counterpart. Thought like matter is energy and cannot be destroyed or annihilated. We have learnt that the mind is not anything permanent or fixed, that it is not a unity but is a series (santati) of thoughts one following the other with such a rapidity that it gives the illusion of permanency and fixity. Death is no interruption to the progress of this series, and no bar to the continuity of this process.

This principle of thought following thought does not end with death because in the last thought-process before death, the terminal thought-moment known as Marāṇasanna Javana Citta (Death-proximate mind) though weak by itself and unable to originate a thought, derives a great potency by reason of the appearance of one of three powerful thought-objects that enter the threshold of the dying mind.

### **Appearance of Three powerful Thought-objects or Death Signs**

These thought-objects the dying man is powerless to resist. These powerful thought-objects are certain Death signs and will be later explained. Thus the dying mind although it lacks the power to originate a thought gets a powerful push or drive by reason of the appearance of one of these three powerful thought-objects or Death signs and is thereby able to cause another thought to arise. This succeeding thought is Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa - (rebirth consciousness or relinking consciousness). Where it arises and how, will be considered later.

### **Dying thought-process is unfailing**

However unconscious a dying man may appear to be to by-standers, it does not mean that this last mental process is not operating within him. This process will always arise



at the dying moment whatever the circumstances of the death may be or however sudden and unexpected the death may be. It is said in the commentaries that even if a man is suddenly thrown into the water and is immediately drowned there is yet time before his death for this terminal thought-process to work. So also it is said that even in the case of a fly who is crushed to death on an anvil by the stroke of a hammer, there is yet time before its death for the terminal thought-process to work.

Thought is energy. It is also creative energy. Apart from the fact that any thought if sufficiently intense can under certain circumstances be a causative and creative agent, the terminal Marāṇasanna a Javana thought deriving as it does its strength from one of the powerful thought-objects or Death-signs mentioned earlier (and which will be fully explained later) can find no difficulty in causing the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa (rebirth-consciousness or relinking consciousness) to arise in an appropriate place. Where that appropriate place is, will be explained later.

### **Reproductive Kamma.**

It may also be mentioned here that the appearance of any one of these three powerful thought-objects or Death signs is conditioned by no other circumstances than the actions of the dying man himself during his lifetime. The particular type of Kamma which operates at this juncture is the so-called Janaka Kamma (reproductive Kamma) since it is the past actions of the dying man that conduce to his being born again, the thought-objects being a reflex of his own actions.

It will now be easy to trace the course of this last thought-process of the dying man. This thought-process does not



contain so many stages as in the normal thought-process that was earlier examined. The order of this process is as follows:

### **ORDER OF A DYING THOUGHT-PROCESS**

1. Bhavanga Atīta - Past unconsciousness.
2. Bhavanga Calana - Vibration of the Bhavanga.
3. Bhavanga upaccheda - arrest of the Bhavanga.
4. Manodvārāvajjana - Advertence through mind-door.
5. Maraṇasanna Javana Citta - Death-proximate Javana impulses or terminal Javana thought-moments.
6. Tadālabhāna - Registration of the experience.
7. Cuti Citta - Death consciousness.
8. Paṭisandhi-Viññāṇa Relinking consciousness or rebirth consciousness occurring in the subsequent life.

#### **1. Bhavanga Atīta (Past unconscious)**

The same remarks that were made about Bhavanga Atīta when a normal thought-process was being traced, are applicable here also. Here too we commence tracing from the stage immediately prior to the running of the death-process in the conscious Vīthi Citta. This would be when the mind is in the Bhavanga state which occurs either at sleep or immediately after one conscious thought-process of the Vīthi Citta has ceased and before another commences. This then is regarded as the first stage for the purpose of investigation though actually the process has not yet started.

#### **2. Bhavanga Calana - Vibration of Bhavanga**

#### **3. Bhavanga Upaccheda - Arrest of the Bhavanga**

The remarks made about these two stages when a normal



thought-process was being examined are applicable here also. Here too a stimulus first causes only a disturbance or vibration of the Bhavanga stream of unconsciousness that is flowing through the mind of the dying man. Later, as the stimulus is persisting the flow of the Bhavanga is completely arrested. The dying man is still not able to recognize or comprehend the stimulus that is at work. This stimulus now is none other than one of those three powerful thought-objects or Death signs which will be fully explained later.

#### **4. Manodvāravajjana - Advertence through the mind-door**

When the normal thought-process was being examined, reference was made to a stage called 'advertence through the Five Sense-doors'. This occurs when the stimulus is capable of being recognized through one or other of the five sense-channels of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. In the case of a dying thought-process this stage of sense-door advertence does not generally occur since the stimulus that arises to disturb the Bhavanga of the dying man is not an external stimulus but is internal in nature being a thought or memory and is capable of being recognized only through the mind-channel. Hence the stage that arises is called 'advertence through the mind-door'.

#### **5. Maraṇasanna Javana Citta. Death-proximate Javana impulses or terminal Javana thought-moments.**

Now comes the psychologically important stage of impulses known as Javana. Everything that has been said about this stage when the normal thought-process was being examined is applicable here except that since death is imminent this mental state of Javana runs for five thought-moments and not seven. It must also be remembered as



stated before, that the dying man being weak cannot originate a thought on his own. One of three powerful thought-objects or Death signs will present itself to him, disturb the smooth flow of his Bhavanga, cause it to subside and induce the Vīthi Citta or conscious mind to arise. After the conscious process has passed through the stages of Bhavanga-vibration, Bhavanga-arrest and Mind-door advertence just described, the present important stage of Javana-impulsions is reached. It is now that the conscious mind or Vīthi Citta is fully able to comprehend the stimulus that awakened it.

### THE POWERFUL THOUGHT - OBJECTS OR DEATH - SIGNS EXPLAINED

The three stimuli one of which is said to present itself before the threshold of the dying mind are equally powerful. Not only does this thought-object become the thought-object of the Maraṇasanna Javana thought (the thought-impulsions at death), it also becomes the thought-object of the Paṭisandhi Citta (Rebirth - consciousness) of the next life and of the Bhavanga Citta of the next life. These last two mental states just mentioned are not of the conscious type but of the unconscious (Bhavanga) type. They too though not conscious, require a thought-object for their existence. They take for their thought-object the particular thought-object entertained in the terminal Javana thought, viz: one of the three Death-Signs. Thus the thought-object of the last conscious thought before death becomes the thought-object of the first thought in the new life. Thus the process of life goes on, each thought giving rise to another, each life giving rise to another. Thought, it must be remembered, is energy. It cannot be lost or destroyed. It goes on, producing its results and they in turn produce theirs, though not necessarily in the



same plane or sphere. Thus the continuity of the being is maintained.

It is not any random thought-object that appears at this terminal stage to disturb the Bhavanga of the dying man nor is it a thought-object of the dying man's choice as he is unable to originate a thought on his own at this terminal stage. It is, as stated before, conditioned by no other circumstances than the actions of the dying man himself during his lifetime. By the operation of Janaka Kamma (reproductive Kamma) the memory of certain powerful actions of the past performed by the dying man thrusts itself before his mind and constitutes the thought-object of the terminal thought-the Marāṇasanna Javana Citta. The subsequent thought is determined by the nature of this terminal thought. No thought can function without an object of thought (arammaṇa) either in the conscious or in the unconscious state. The three powerful objects of thought or Death Signs, one of which arises at the terminal stage, are as follows :-

#### (i) Kamma

The memory of a very important and weighty act, good or bad, performed shortly before his death will come to him however sudden be his death or however unconscious he may be to his surroundings. Such an act is known as āsanna Kamma, *i.e.* an act done when death is nearby. In the large majority of cases no such good act is done just before the advent of death, the time of which is not known beforehand. In the absence of such an act good or bad, then the memory of any act habitually performed by him will present itself to the dying man. This act is called āciṇṇa Kamma *i.e.* the practised act or habitual act. The moral or immoral consciousness experienced at the time of the commission of the death proximate act or the habitual act now arises as a fresh consciousness at the dying moment.



### **(ii) Kamma nimitta**

To the dying man a memory may sometimes present itself not of any act done good or bad, recent or habitual, but of something symbolic of the act done by him ("Kamma" means action, and "nimitta" means sign or symbol). Thus a butcher may see a knife or a drunkard may see a bottle, or a pilgrim may see a shrine. These are seen through the mind's eye, *i.e.* through the mind-avenue and not through the physical eye.

### **(iii) Gati Nimitta**

The object of a dying man's last thought may also be some indication or anticipation of the place where he is to be reborn. Thus fire may present itself to the mind's eye of the person destined to be reborn in hell and one whose destiny is the world of gods may see beautiful flowers and beautiful mansions. Dr. W. T. Evans Wentz in "The Tibetan Book of the Dead" has referred to certain cases of persons who have had at the time of death premonitory visions of their future destiny. It is also fairly well known both in Ceylon and elsewhere that some dying persons have given utterance to such visions experienced by them. There was a genuine case at Kalutara (Ceylon) where a dying girl of twelve cheerfully told her parents standing sorrowfully by her bedside that a beautiful carriage decked with garlands of beautiful flowers was waiting to take her away.

### **(6) Tadālabhāna - Registration of the experience**

After the stage of Maraṇasanna Javana Citta there arises in the death-process the stage of Tadālabhāna which has also been earlier commented on. It merely registers the experience of the impression received and is not of much importance psychologically. There are no effects resulting from it.



### **(7) Cuti citta - Death-Consciousness**

This is the last thought to be experienced in the present life. (Cuti means disappearance or death). There is now to the dying mind an awareness of death. It is not the conscious Vithi Citta that experiences this awareness. It is experienced by the Bhavanga Citta. Being the last Bhavanga thought of the present life, it takes for its object the object of the first Bhavanga thought of the present life, *i.e.* the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa of the present life. Cuti Citta is also not of much importance psychologically. It does not produce any results. It is merely a consciousness of death. Hence what is regarded as the terminal thought is not the Cuti Citta but the Maraṇasanna Javana Citta.

### **(8) Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa - Relinking consciousness**

The next stage in the process though not arising in the mind of the dying man, is the highly important stage of Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa, Relinking Consciousness or Rebirth consciousness. The process of one thought leading to another though not in the same personality, can be appreciated if we desist from regarding the mind as some permanent unchanging unit. If on the other hand we regard the mind (as in reality it is) as a series or succession of mental states, it is not difficult to imagine how one mental state in one life can give rise to another mental state in another life. It is the mental state known as Maraṇasanna Javana Citta, the terminal mental state of the dying man that gives rise to the Paṭisandhi Citta or Relinking Consciousness in another life. Paṭisandhi Citta is aptly rendered as Re-linking Consciousness ("Paṭisandhi" literally means "rejoining", since it links up the present life with the next). That is why the thought objects of both mental states are the same. In other words the thought-object of the terminal dying thought becomes the thought-object of the resultant Paṭisandhi Citta. A thorough comprehension of Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa is absolutely



essential for an understanding of the mechanism of rebirth. In the first instance, it must be understood that it is not the Cuti Citta but the preceding Maraṇasanna Javana Citta that gives rise to the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa. Cuti Citta is an unconscious thought of the Bhavanga Citta whereas the terminal Maraṇasanna Javana Citta is a thought of the conscious Vithi Citta. There is a belief that the Cuti Citta gives rise to the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa. This is not correct since, as stated earlier the Cuti Citta (Death-consciousness) is merely a registering agent and performs no active function which can give rise to any result. Though it is the last thought in the dying process it is an unconscious thought. It merely registers the awareness of death. In conformity with the Law of Change, the Law of Becoming, the Law of Continuity, the Law of Action and Reaction and the Law of Attraction, the terminal Maraṇasanna Javana Citta (Death-proximate Javana Thought) receives one of those three powerful terminal thought objects or Death Signs referred to earlier as its thought-object and then by reason of the operation of the same laws just mentioned gives rise to the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa - a thought of the unconscious type (Bhavanga) which forms the nucleus of the next life.

When it is said that the Maraṇasanna Javana Citta of the dying man gives rise to the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa we must realize that the former mental state causes the latter mental state to arise, it being the causative factor. For such a highly important result to arise, the causative factor must necessarily be just as powerful. Let us examine the source of its potency.

### **Potency of the Terminal Maraṇasanna Thought**

We know that there is creative power in thought if it is sufficiently intense. The very first stanza of the Dhammapada which was earlier cited, refers to the supremacy of the



mind (mano-setṭha) and to the fact that everything is mind-born (mano-maya). In his book "Thoughts are Things", W. W. Atkinson has one full chapter entitled "Creative Thought". He says:- "Science perceives the constant effort of the inner to express itself in the outer - the invisible trying to be visible - the unmanifest trying to be manifest..... Thoughts strive to take form in action. Thoughts strive ever to materialize themselves in objective material form".

A part from this inherent creative power of thought, the terminal thought is the last active thought of the dying man. We can therefore justifiably expect the last thought to be the most forceful. The last spurt of a runner in a race often discloses his greatest strength. At its last fruit-bearing season a dying tree is said to yield its largest produce. Often the highest and greatest manifestation of any force or power is a type of swan song preceding its own disruption or dissolution. Since the desire for existence (Taṇha) is the predominating motive underlying well nigh all the activities of man, at the moment of death it grows so formidable that it adopts a grasping attitude (mentally). As the Buddha himself has said (and this too was cited earlier), at the dying moment this predominating Taṇha becomes a Grasping Force (Upādāna) that attracts to itself another existence. **It is the last thought-process that carries with it this Grasping Force.**

Psychology tells us that the last thought prior to sleep is very powerful and influences the first thought in the morning at the time of awakening. It is a common experience that if one wishes to catch an early morning train and if he retires to bed suggesting to himself that he should awake in time for the train, then he is certain to awake in good time for the train however much a late riser he may



habitually be. The success of the auto-suggestive affirmations prescribed by the famous healer Emile Coue of Nancy are due to the fact that they are practised by his patients just before they retire to sleep. Anything suggested to the mind at this time tends to produce a powerful effect. The mind is highly receptive to suggestion at this time. As stated in "Psychology and Practical Life" by Collins and Drever (the former is a Lecturer and the latter a Professor of Psychology at the University of Edinburgh):- "Natural suggestibility is enhanced by certain conditions. In the states grouped together as "hypnoidal" — the state between sleep and waking, sleep itself, hypnosis — suggestibility is very high". These same authors refer to the employment within recent times of hypnosis in order to obtain anaesthesia for surgical operations.

There is thus a recognition of the great creative value and potency of the last thought prior to sleep coming as it does so close to the time of activity of the powerful sub-conscious mind, for hardly anything else intervenes between this last thought and the arising of the sub-conscious mind which sleep induces. Hence since the last conscious thought prior to sleep, becomes the first thought when one awakes from his sleep, by a parity of reasoning is it too much to assume that his last conscious thought before the sleep of death—the terminal Maraṇāsanna Javana thought—becomes the first thought, the Paṭisandhi Citta of the next life to which he awakens?

The terminal thought is all concentrated energy, and as such it cannot die down although the man has died. Being creative energy it must manifest itself somewhere. As stated by Dr. E. R. Rost:- "Therefore when a being dies, all the forces locked up in the brain and represented by consciousness, are not lost or dissipated in space, but, just as in this



life there is the continuity of the sequence of consciousness in the life-stream, so is there the continuity of the same life-stream at death. And as this life stream requires for its functioning a nidus in the evolutionary scale of beings so is it the same, on its subjective side, of the formation of an objective basis".

(*"Nature of Consciousness"* ).

So according to Buddhism, this potent terminal thought, receiving as its object one of those three powerful thought-objects or Death Signs referred to earlier, must be deemed to be possessed of great creative power. Its function is referred to as "**Abhīnavakāraṇa**" *i.e.* the prearing of a new existence". It is for this purpose that one of the powerful thought-objects or Death Signs appears before the mind of the dying man. Then, when the terminal thought receives this special thought-object and thereafter subsides, there will simultaneously arise in the next life the Paṭisandhi Citta carrying with it the same thought-object as that of the terminal thought. This Paṭisandhi Citta being something mental it can normally arise only in association with a physical counterpart. It therefore arises in a maternal womb—not haphazardly in any mother's womb—but in an appropriate mother's womb in an appropriate environment, appropriate to the type of life led in the present existence. Man being a psycho-physical combination, a nāma-rūpa or mind-body combination, the reborn man too is a mind-body combination. There is however nothing to prevent a man being reborn in the spirit world where he will have only mind but no body. Here too the Paṭisandhi Citta does arise.

It, will thus be seen that it is the combined operation of all the fundamental laws or principles dealt with earlier in separate chapters that results in the phenomenon of rebirth.



Those principles deal with Change, Becoming, Continuity, Cause and Effect and Attraction. The German Philosopher Schopenhauer most of whose views are very Buddhistic, as stated by Ven. Nyanajivako Thero in "Schopenhauer and Buddhism" (Wheel Publication No. 139-141) has said: "At the hour of death all the mysterious forces (although really rooted in ourselves (which determine man's fate crowd together and come into action.'" These mysterious forces are none other than the fundamental laws just referred to. They are natural laws, mysterious only when we do not understand them. It is their combined operation that results in rebirth. Rebirth therefore is just a natural result of the operation of these natural laws.

## CHAPTER X

### HOW A THOUGHT-PROCESS AT BIRTH WORKS

Now that we have studied the thought-process at death according to Buddhist psychology, we should turn our attention to the thought-process at birth. In the light of what had already been said about various mental states in Chapters V and VI entitled respectively "How a normal thought-process works" and "How a thought-process at death works", the thought-process at birth can easily be followed without much comment since the mental states that occur in this process have already been studied in the earlier chapters. The order of the thought-process at birth which involves 5 stages is as follows:-

1. Relinking consciousness (*Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa*)
2. Bhavanga Citta (*The unconscious*)



3. Mind-door advertence (*Manodvārāvajjana*)
4. Javana (*thought-impulsions*)
5. Bhavanga Citta (*The unconscious*)

### 1. Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa (*Relinking Consciousness*)

In the list of mental states enumerated in the last chapter indicating the thought-process at death, the last mental state mentioned, viz. Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa or Relinking consciousness is not a state occurring in the mind of the dying man but it was nevertheless mentioned in that list because the other mental states in that list along with this Relinking consciousness *form part of one continuous process.* This Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa occurs in the mind of the reborn being or to be more precise, it occurs in the mind of the pre-natal being viz. the embryo. In fact it is this Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa type of mental energy-which along with the parental sperm cells and ovum cells combine to create an embryo in an appropriate mother's womb. Thus it is this relinking consciousness (or rebirth consciousness) that starts the nucleus of new mind-body combination, a new nāma-rūpa, in an appropriate mother's womb. This embryo then is a mixture of mind and matter. The parental sperm and ovum cells provide the material part of the embryo while the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa or relinking consciousness provides the mental part. It is this Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa which links the dying life with the new life. It becomes a link because it is a resultant of the terminal Maraṇāsanna Javana thought of the dying man and takes the same thought-object viz. one of the three Death Signs. The process of one thought giving rise to another never ends. The last conscious thought at the moment of death is no exception to this process. It too gives rise to another thought though not in the same body. That other thought is the Patisandhi



Viññāṇa. It lasts for just one moment to be followed by the Bhavanga Citta or the Unconscious.

## 2. Bhavanga Citta (The unconscious)

The initial Patisandhi Citta is thereafter succeeded by the Bhavanga Citta which is said to last for 16 thought-moments. In this pre-natal stage as the unborn being is still part of the body of the mother, it does not normally 'contact the external world. It is therefore the stream of Bhavanga that keeps on flowing smoothly without an interruption in the pre-natal child-mind. As life has just commenced this mental state is not full grown. This is how Shwe Zan Aung describes it in his Appendix to "The Compendium of Philosophy":- "When a being is conceived, Buddhist belief gives him a congenital mind simultaneously with the inception of a physical growth as the result of the past Janaka (generative) Kamma. That mind at the moment of conception is but a bare state of sub-consciousness identical with the more adult Bhavanga - consciousness during dreamless sleep."

## 3. Mind-door advertence (Manōdwārāvajjana)

As stated earlier, the Bhavanga Citta lasts for 16 thought-moments and then subsides. This is followed by the mental state known as Mind-door Advertence (Manōdwārāvajjana). The Bhavanga nature of the mental state of the embryo gives way to the conscious Vīthi Citta on account of the desire that arises in the mind of the embryo for its new existence.

## 4. Javana (thought-impulsions)

Immediately after the mental state known as Manōdwārāvajjana (mind-door advertence) has subsided, the state of Javana or thought-impulsions arises. It carries further the thought that arose through the mind-door channel



viz. the desire for its new existence. These Javana thought-impulsions develop this desire in the new being for its new existence. (Bhava-nikanti Javana). They run for seven thought-moments.

### **5. Bhavanga Citta (The unconscious)**

When the seven Javana thought-moments have arisen and subsided the smooth flow of the unconscious Bhavanga again arises. It will flow on smoothly until something occurs to interrupt it but this is hardly likely. When the pre-natal embryo is born and assumes a separate existence, it begins to contact the external world. The normal thought-process will then follow.

## **CHAPTER XI**

# **THE BIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF BIRTH AND THE BUDDHIST EXPLANATION**

Material sciences seek to explain birth only on a material basis on the premises of what can be seen, viz. the present life. Hence the biologist would say that the union of the sperm cells of the father and ovum cells of the mother result in the birth of a child and that the physical and mental characteristics of the child's parents and its ancestors influence the characteristics of the child. Biology being silent on any mental or psychic factor, knows of only two influencing and causative factors—heredity and environment. But is this a completely satisfying explanation? Take the case of two children of the same parents and of the same environment. How is it that one child from birth may be well-built, strong



and healthy while the other child from birth may be a weakling? An explanation may be offered by reference to the differing health conditions of the mother at the time of the two different births. Consider then the case of twins having the same heredity and same environment. How can the physical and mental differences that are often seen to exist between twin-children be explained? Take the case of the well-known Siamese twins Chang and Eng who were conjoined to each other at the navel from birth. Here is a case of identically the same heredity and the same environment. Specialists who have studied their behaviour when they arrived in London are reported to have said that they differ widely in temperament and that while Chang is addicted to liquor, Eng is a teetotaller. Can heredity and environment explain those startling cases of child prodigies so well known in the East as well as in the West, when not only the child's parents but even its ancestors on both sides have never exhibited such tendencies? These circumstances urge the thinking mind to consider whether there is not some other factor at work besides heredity and environment. It is wrong to expect a highly complex psycho-physical organism like man to arise from the combination of two purely physical factors like the sperm cells and the ovum cells of the parents. It is only the intervention of the third factor a psychic factor that can bring about the birth of a child. Wick and oil can never produce a flame. Not until a bright light comes from elsewhere will the action of wick and oil result in a flame. A plant is not the product of seed and soil only. From an extraneous source must come another factor, viz. light. Similarly the combination of two purely physical factors - the parental sperm and ovum cannot provide the opportunity for the formation of an embryo which is a mixture of both mind and matter. A psychic factor must combine with the two physical factors, to produce the



psycho-physical organism that an embryo is.

Then again how does biology explain the determination of sex in an embryo? The embryo is supposed to derive its characteristics from what are known as the genes of the parents. The embryo is said to consist of the chromosomes of the female parent and the male parent in equal proportions and sex is determined by the way in which the chromosomes combine. The male cell is said always to contain one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. On the other hand the female cell is said to contain always two X chromosomes. At the time of conception the male sperm cell uniting with the female ovum cell a complete new cell is formed which later becomes the embryo. Sometimes the X and Y chromosomes combine to form a male cell while at other times they combine to form a female cell. Biology does not seem to be able to explain these differences in combination. So long as only the physical causes are reckoned with, no suitable explanation can ever be made.

In the "Encyclopedia of the Biological Sciences" edited by Peter Gray, Professor of Biology University of Pittsburgh (6th Edition 1968) the concluding paragraph of the long article under the head "Genetics" contains the following significant sentence:- "Much of the picture of gene action is of course hypothetical and remains to be worked out in detail".

In "Biology for the modern world" by C. H. Waddington, Professor of Animal Genetics, University of Edinburgh, in the chapter on "Sex and Reproduction" the following passage is found:- "These chromosomes influence the type of hormone produced in the developing organism. An organism with an XX constitution, produces female hormones. The presence of XY chromosomes on the other



hard induces male hormones. In this system the differential which decides which of the basic potentialities shall be realized depends on the operation of one of the most reliable mechanisms in the body, namely the separation of pairs of chromosomes into single chromosomes at the time when the germ cells are formed. **Very occasionally however the mechanism goes wrong .....**It is only in the last few years that the technique of examining human chromosomes has become refined to the point when abnormalities of the sex chromosomes can be reliably determined. **We are therefore only at the beginning of the exploration of such abnormalities**".

Although Professor Waddington refers to the separation of pairs of chromosomes into single chromosomes at the time when germ cells are formed, as one of the most reliable mechanisms in the body, yet it is most significant, that in almost the same breath he is constrained to admit that very occasionally the mechanism goes wrong. It has been found that sometimes although the correct proportions of the correct type of chromosomes are present which should result in the arising of a male embryo, yet it is not a male embryo that arises. Similarly sometimes with regard to a female embryo, although the chromosomal proportions are correct, genetically the results are different. Hence it is that in "Physician's Handbook", a book written by four Professors of Medicine (Professors Krupp, Swertz, Jawetsz and Biglieri, 15th Edition) under the chapter entitled "Chromosomal Sex Determination", this most significant sentence appears:- "It is not yet possible to equate chromosomal sex with genetic sex".

In a foreword to Professor Waddington's book earlier referred to, Sir Sarvapalli Radakrishnan one-time Professor



of Philosophy writes as follows:- "The scientist is a dedicated servant of Truth. Because he deals with the world of nature, he is likely to overlook the role of the human spirit in scientific endeavour. If he believes that there is nothing more than the world of nature to which we are tied, we will suffer from an inner emptiness, anxiety, split consciousness. Man is essentially a subject and not a mere object, a thing among things. When this subjectivity is recognised, the distance between science and humanity is diminished".

In this connection, the words of Mrs. Annie Besant are worth quoting:- "Modern science is proving more and more clearly that heredity plays an ever decreasing part in the evolution of the higher creatures, that all mental and moral qualities are not transmitted from parents to offspring and the higher the qualities the more patent is this fact. The child of a genius is of times a colt. Commonplace parents give birth to a genius". (Ancient Wisdom).

Further in this connection, what Dahlke has to say, is equally worth quoting:- "When science teaches that I am descended wholly and entirely from my parents, it teaches that the I-process is not kindled at all but propels itself hither from parents, grandparents and so forth - does not burn but rolls - so making necessary the question as to the first beginning of this motion; for everything set in motion urged outward - in short every reaction must have a first moment of beginning. In contradistinction to science the Buddha teaches: The parents provide the material, the groundwork, but the I-energy of some disintegrated I-process corresponding uniquely to these potentialities sets all alight. Here I take rise in my parents as the fountain takes its rise in the hill. That the fountain does so is beyond all cavil, is patent to everyone, yet it is but an alien guest - Thus the Buddha is



the only one to abide by actuality, the only one with whom the entire miracle of propagation takes its place among mundane events conforming likewise to the laws of mundane occurrence”.

In his “The Buddha and his Teachings”, Ven. Narada Maha Thero while strongly expressing his view that heredity cannot account for the birth of a criminal in a long line of honourable ancestors or for the birth of a saint in a family of evil repute quotes the following passage from Dr. Th. Pascal’s book “Reincarnation”:-

“To return to the role played by the germ in the question of heredity, we repeat that the physical germ, of itself alone, explains only a portion of man; it throws light on the physical side of heredity but leaves in as great a darkness as ever the problem of moral and intellectual faculty. If it represented the whole man one would expect to find in any individual the qualities manifested in his progenitors and parents - never any other; these qualities could not exceed the amount possessed by the parents, whereas we find criminals from birth in the most respectable families and saints born to parents who are the very scum of society”.

According to the Buddhist explanation of birth, as stated earlier, purely physical causative factors like the parental sperm and ovum, cannot result in the arising of an embryo which is a combination of both mind and matter. Man is a psycho-physical organism and as such the causative factors must be both physical and psychical. In the Mahatanha Sankhaya Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 38, the Buddha has said that apart from the union of father and mother, and the mother’s proper time, there must also be the presence of, what the Buddha calls, the **gandhabba**. The word **gandhabba** literally means “a stranger” or “one came from afar”.



As a variation of “Gantabba” gerund of the verb “gacchati” (to go), it means “one who has to go”. These meanings have reference to one who has died elsewhere and have no reference to the parental factor. It refers to the mental content of the terminal thought of a dying person which results in that psychically important Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa or relinking consciousness which combining with the parental sperm and ovum helps to form the embryo. **It is the energy-potential released from a dying man.** It is metaphorically “one come from afar” or “one who has to go” *i.e.* to go from the place where he was. “Paṭisandhi” means “re-linking”. It is called relinking consciousness because it links the last consciousness of the dying mind with the first consciousness of the embryo. Both types of consciousness therefore have the same “arammana” or object of thought, viz: one or other of the three powerful Death-Signs.

This then is the new mental counterpart, the new “nama” which in a new mother’s womb in association with the new “rupa”—the new mental counter part, viz. the new parental sperm cells and ovum cells, will cause the arising of a fresh embryo - the nucleus of a new human life. This new human life cannot but be regarded as the resultant of the past human life. The thoughts, words and deeds (sankhārā) of the past life produced certain energies or Kammic forces which at the end of that past life were potent enough to attract the necessary conditions for a new life in an appropriate place according to the strength and quality of those forces on the principle of “like attracts like” (Law of Attraction) and also by virtue of that other great law - the law of Action and Reaction. It is these forces that constitute the third causative factor of birth. It is a psychic factor and in the psychic plane time and distance do not count. It will thus be seen that these potential Kammic energies work in conjunction with the biological laws to condition the formation of an



embryo is an appropriate mother's womb. The Ven. Nyanatiloka Maha Thero's explanatory comments on this point are worth readings:-

“With regard to the characteristic features, the tendencies and faculties lying latent in the embryo, the Buddha's teaching may be explained in the following way - The dying individual with his whole being convulsively clinging to life, at the very moment of his death, sends forth karmic energies which like a flash of lightening, hit at a new mother's womb ready for conception” (*Karma and Rebirth* - Wheel publication No. 9).

Thus the process of a changing consciousness continues without interruption although in a different place or plane and the change of consciousness which takes place at the end of one life is no different in essence from the change of consciousness which takes place from moment to moment within one life.

## CHAPTER XII

### RECALL OF PAST LIVES THROUGH HYPNOSIS

The theory that all thoughts of incidents and events, of all feelings and desires that enter the conscious mind make their impressions in the unconscious before they fade away from the conscious mind, has been established beyond doubt by the researches of psychologists who study and practise the science of hypnosis. These impressions are all stored up in the great reservoir of the unconscious Bhavanga Citta. It has been found that by the method known as hypnotic age-regression the



memory not only of forgotten important events but even of trivial incidents long since forgotten can be recalled from the unconscious mind. What the hypnotist does, is first to induce sleep in the subject. In this sleep - state the subject will answer truthfully any question put to him. The hypnotist by means of his voice keeps in touch with the subject and prevents normal sleep supervening. The hypnotically induced sleep is different from normal sleep: This is known as the hypnotic sleep or trance. The subject, when in this state, is asked questions relating to incidents starting from the time the subject came to the hypnotist who then gradually regresses him backwards to his earliest infancy about which also the subject will be questioned. All these questions he will answer truthfully. On awaking to consciousness he will not remember anything of what he said or did. He will not even remember the fact of having been questioned. This is because it was not the conscious mind that answered. During the induced sleep the conscious mind was in abeyance and it was the unconscious mind that answered.

All the events of early childhood can thus be vividly recalled and, what is most interesting, they can also be vividly re-lived. Vivid re-living of forgotten experiences can take place in the hypnotic sleep, for in that condition, the conscious mind not being active, the unconscious is free to release memories of the forgotten incidents along with any very strong reactions to them that had been experienced at that time. This condition is technically called **hypermnesia**. For instance if the forgotten incident is one of terror and fright, the hypnotised individual while recalling the incident may exhibit that same terror and fright. If it is an incident of intense sorrow which made him weep, then the hypnotised individual while recalling that incident may exhibit the same intense sorrow and may also weep. Such cases are quite



common. Once a man of sixty was under hypnosis regressed to his childhood and was asked whether he had written in copy-books. He said he did. On being asked whether he can remember any particular line that he copied out, he said, "I can remember copying out the line - a stitch in time saves nine". Given pencil and paper and asked to write out that line, he - still in the unconscious state-wrote out that line not in the firm handwriting of an adult but in the unpractised shaky handwriting of a child. The hypnotised subject, however, on awaking to consciousness could not remember anything that he said or did as nothing was done with the conscious mind. There is thus this two-fold nature of the human mind - the conscious and the unconscious - the truth of which has been amply established by these hypnotic methods. As stated by Troward in the Edinburgh lectures on Mental Science:- "The great truth which the science of hypnotism has brought to light is the dual nature of the human mind". It must also be mentioned that it is not everyone who responds to the method of hypnosis. There are cases of inherent natural resistance to hypnotic suggestion.

This method is not confined to recalling past memories of this life only. Psychologists have been able to recall memories of past-lives in numerous recorded cases. Hypnotised persons on being asked to go back in time and to mention their very earliest memories have recalled incidents in their past lives which after an exhaustive and impartial examination have been found to be correct. There is room to mention one such case only. It is one of the earliest recorded cases.

Professor Theodore Flournoy of Geneva University hypnotised a Swiss girl who after answering questions regarding her past in this life, was thereafter requested to recall



her earliest time of living. She said she could remember her life as an Arab chief's daughter. She said she could remember her name at that time. It was Simandane. She was able to speak Arabic as she did then. She remembered having married A Hindu Raja called Sivruka. She was able to show her intimate knowledge about Indian dancing. She remembered her husband constructing a fortress called Chandragiri. Professor Flourncy wrote a book about this case after having verified these details from ancient documents and Professor McDougall has referred to this case in his "An Outline of Abnormal Psychology". This is just one of several hundreds of similar cases.

In this connection reference must be made to a book which was published in 1950 and created a great sensation. Within seven years it reached its 10th edition. The book is entitled "Many Mansions" and the authoress is Gina Cerminara. It deals with wonderful cures effected by one Edgar Cayce. His technique is to get himself hypnotised and in that state he would be able to discover the previous lives of his patients and find out the root cause if such there is, of the illnesses from which they were in this life suffering. In that hypnotic state he would prescribe the cure but on his awaking he will not remember what he had said. The patient or someone on his behalf must question Edgar Cayce and then he would answer and prescribe the cure. These answers are typed in duplicate, one is given to the patient and the other is filed of record. They are called "Readings" and there at present over 20,000 such readings preserved at the Cayce institute in Virginia Beach (U. S. A.).



## CHAPTER XIII

# SPONTANEOUS RECALL OF PAST LIVES

There are numbers of cases of children who spontaneously come out with recollections of their past lives without the intervention of hypnosis.

Dr. Ian Stevenson, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Virginia U. S. A., in his booklet entitled "The evidence of survival from claimed memories of former incarnations", has dealt with several cases of spontaneous recall of past lives. This book was the winning essay of the contest in honour of Professor William James, the well known psychologist. These cases of which he gives a full description, are from various countries such as Havana, India, France and Sicily. In part II of this booklet he analyzes the evidence in order to consider whether there are other possible explanations for this recall of past lives, such as fraud, racial memory, extra-sensory perception, retrocognition and precognition. He also deals with reincarnation which he considers to be the most plausible explanation for these cases. In a later book entitled "Twenty cases suggestive of Reincarnation" he deals with further cases of spontaneous recall. Three of these cases are from Ceylon.

It is not everyone who is able to recall spontaneously the memory of a past existence. Such a recall is possible only in exceptional cases and that too in children only. Investigations have not yet reached the stage when it is possible to say in what cases such a recall can take place but it has been observed that in nearly all the cases of spontaneous recall the previous lives were cut off in early childhood by some form of violent death such as an accident or serious illness.



It has also been observed that the child's memory of the previous life fades away as the child advances in age. There can be other reasons for the inability to recall past lives. For instance, if an individual's previous life was that of an animal, it is just possible that the animal mind not being so developed as the human mind, may not be able to register impressions with the clarity and accuracy of the human mind, with the result that such a reborn individual may not be able to recall his past at all. Hypnotic regression then cannot help in these cases.

By a process of meditation on certain lines it is possible for anyone to reach a state when his mind is so purified that its range of mental vision is no more obstructed. In that event one can develop the memory of past lives. This is called "*pubbe nivāsānussati ñāna*". This of course postulates such a high degree of purity that not until one attains the state of the fourth "*Jhana*" is this knowledge available. Thus have the Buddhas and Arahants been able to view the past lives not only of their own but also of others as well.

The next Chapter contains an account of four cases of spontaneous recall of previous lives the details of which have been checked up and found to be correct.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME INVESTIGATED CASES OF REBIRTH

#### Case of Pramod

Pramod the second son of Professor Bankey Lal Sharma of Bissauli in Uttar Pradesh, India was born on October 11th



1944. When he was about two and a half years old he told his mother not to cook because he had a wife in Moradabad who could cook. Moradabad is a town about ninety miles away from Bissauli. The boy took an extraordinary interest in biscuits. Whenever he saw anyone purchasing biscuits he would tell him that he owned a large biscuit factory in Moradabad. Whenever he was taken to a big shop he would say that his shop at Moradabad was much bigger. He also said that he had a large soda-water factory there. Later he said that his name was Paramanand and had a brother called Mohanlal and that the two together owned this biscuit factory and soda factory which were run under the name of Mohan Brothers. He also said that he died of a stomach ailment resulting from eating too much curd.

Pramod's parents took no notice of these references to a previous life. Pramod however continued to repeat these references and often insisted that he should be taken to Moradabad. Those references reached the ears of a family in Moradabad who owned a soda and biscuit factory under the name of Mohan Brothers. One of the brothers, Parmanand had died on 9th May 1943. He had suffered from a chronic gastro-intestinal ailment as a result of excessive eating of curd. He died of appendicitis and peritonitis. As the story the family had heard, tallied with the events and circumstances of the life of the deceased Paramanand, the other brother Mohan Lal with some of his relatives came to Bissauli to see this Pramod who claimed to be the dead Paramanand. They missed him as he had left for a distant village to meet a relative, but the boy's father Professor Sharma promised to bring the boy to Moradabad. Shortly thereafter the father kept his word by bringing the boy to Moradabad. The boy was then about five years old.



Father and son travelled by train and on alighting from the train at Moradabad Railway Station Parmond at once recognised Mohan Lal as his former brother and running upto him embraced him fondly. From the Railway Station they were driven in a tonga to Mohan Lal's house.

On the way Pramod recognised a building which he said was the Town Hall and then remarked that their shop should not be very far off. It is significant that Pramod used the English expression "Town Hall" although that expression is not at all known in his native Bissauli. The tonga on purpose was being driven past the correct shop without stopping there, in order to watch Pramod's reactions. Pramod at once called out for the tonga to halt remarking that this was the shop. When the vehicle stopped, this boy led the way to the house where he claimed to have lived. He then entered the room set apart for religious devotions and stood there for a moment in reverential worship.

Inside the house he recognised his former mother. He recognised his former wife and enquired why she was not wearing the "bindu" mark on her forehead. He recognised his former daughter and two sons of his and some relatives but he could not recognise his eldest son who had greatly changed in appearance after the father's death.

On entering the soda-factory he found that the machine there would not work. The water connection had been deliberately stopped in order to see what Pramod would do. He detected at once that the machine would not operate because the water connection was not working and immediately set it right explaining to the workmen there how this could be done. He was only five years old when he thus instructed the workmen.

Pramod spent two happy days at Moradabad where



he was able to reveal his familiarity with many places, many buildings and many persons including even a Muslim debtor to whom he remarked "I have to get some money back from you". The boy was so fond of Moradabad that it was very difficult to induce him to return to his home in Bissauli. Eventually he was carried away in his sleep by his father. Subsequently, one day wishing again to revisit Moradabad he ran away from home unnoticed and went as far as the Railway Station in Bissauli when he was brought back much to his discomfiture.

This case was first investigated within a few weeks of Parmod's first visit to Moradabad by Professor B.L. Attcya of Benares University. A few years later the case was further investigated by Professor Ian Stevenson of Virginia University, who later made another visit to recheck the case. His account of this case with his analysis of the recorded evidence and his comments appears in his book "Twenty cases suggestive of reincarnation."

### **The case of Shanti Devi**

Shanti Devi was born in 1926 in Delhi. From about her third year she began to refer to her former life in Muttra, a town sixty miles away from Delhi. She said that her former name was Lugdi and that she was married to a cloth merchant called Kadar Nath Chaubey. She also stated that ten days after giving birth to a male child she died. As Shanti Devi was repeatedly making these references to her former life, her parents wrote to Kadar Nath Chaubey who to their surprise answered the letter. In his reply he confirmed the correctness of Shanti Devi's references which were conveyed to him. Later he sent a relative of his to visit the girl and followed this up with his own visit which was unannounced. The girl identified him. Shortly thereafter



enquiries were made and it was established that the girl had never been out of her native Delhi. A committee was then appointed to witness her visit to Delhi and to watch her reaction .

On alighting at the Railway Station of Muttra, out of a large crowd of persons she recognised another relative of Chaubey. When she entered the horse-carriage that was made ready for her, she was asked to give instructions to the driver. She then directed the way right upto the house of Chaubey which, having been repainted, bore a different appearance in spite of which she was able to recognise it. She was also able to identify Chaubey's old father.

A number of questions were put to her before she entered the house, regarding the accommodation there and the arrangement of furniture there, all of which she correctly answered. She also identified about fifty persons out of a crowd that had gathered there. On going to the house of Chaubey's parents she pointed to a corner in a particular room where she said she had buried some money. The place was dug up but no money was found. Thereupon Chaubey confessed that after her death he had removed the money.

This case was investigated in 1936 by the International Aryan League, Delhi, and is referred to by Professor Ian Stevenson in his book "The evidence for survival from claimed memories of former incarnations".

### **The case of Gnanatillake.**

Gnanatillake was born on 14th February 1956 at an insignificant village sixteen miles away from Talawakelle, Ceylon. When she was about two years old, she began making references to a previous life. Later when she heard



that some persons from her village had returned from a visit to Talawakelle she promptly remarked that Talawakelle was the place where her former parents had lived and began to give details of her former home and even mentioned the names of her family members. The credit of discovering this case goes to Mr. H. S. Nissanka of Kandy. Equal credit goes to Ven. Piyadassi Maha Thero of Vajiraramaya, Colombo, who along with Mr. Nissanka pursued this case with the greatest interest and enthusiasm. They visited the girl's home and tactfully questioning the shy girl elicited much valuable information regarding details of her former life and home.

It was ascertained that her previous home was near a tea-factory in Talawakelle, that she was then a boy and went to school with her sister by train which passed through a long tunnel. (Everything points to the school being Sri Pada College, Hatton). She said that one day standing by the road, she and her sister watched the Queen travelling by train (The present Queen Elizabeth visited Ceylon in 1954 and travelling by train passed through Talawakelle.)

Both Ven. Piyadassi and Mr. Nissanka were determined to find out the house in Talawakelle where Gnanatillake had claimed she had lived as a boy and died. They went to several places and questioned several persons. They spent several hours at the office of the Registrar of Deaths but without success. With several others also assisting in the search, Gnanatillake was taken to Talawakelle where she identified several buildings in the town but could not locate her former house as it had been demolished since her death. Ultimately they managed to contact the parents of a boy who had attended Sri Pada College Hatton and had died on 9th November 1954 at the age of twelve. When



the parents were questioned and details of the boy's life were ascertained, it became apparent that this information tallied with what Gnanatillake had said about her previous life.

A board of enquiry with Ven. Piyadassi Maha Thero as President was then held at the Talawakelle Rest House where many witnesses were examined among them being the members of Tillekeratna's family, a teacher who had taught Tillekeratna, and the principal of Sri Pada College, Hatton. At this meeting which was held in the presence of a large public gathering, Gnanatillake was for the first time confronted with Tillekeratna's mother whom she identified with an earnest look remarking softly "That is my Talawakelle mother".

Professor Ian Stevenson visited Talawakelle in 1961 and conducted an independent investigation of this case. His account along with his analysis of the recorded evidence and his comments appear in his book "Twenty cases suggestive of reincarnation". Mr. Nissanka has given a full account of this case in a book written in Sinhalese, entitled "Newatha upan deriya" (The Reborn Girl).

### **The case of H. A. Wijeyratne.**

H. A. Wijeyratne the youngest son of H. A. Tillekeratna Hamy was born on 17th January 1947 at Kaltota a small village not many miles away from the town of Balangoda. From his birth there appears a marked hollow on the right side of his chest below the right collar bone and the right armpit. His right hand is thin and emaciated and the fingers in that hand are half the normal length. From about his third year, whenever he was by himself, he had a habit of walking round his house and muttering to himself. This



peculiar behaviour was first noticed by his mother who overheard him saying that the deformity in his hand was due to his having stabbed his wife in his former life. He used to make these remarks looking at his right hand. The father, Tillekeratna Hamy, tried to dissuade the boy from referring to this incident but without success. Curiously a younger brother of Tillekeratna Hamy called Ratran Hamy, had been sentenced to death and executed in 1928 for the murder of his wife. The further details given by Wijeyratne regarding the circumstances of his previous life and regarding the charge of murder brought against him tally with the circumstances of Ratranhamy's life and the charge of murder Ratranhamy had to face.

Ven. Ananda Maitreya Maha Thero of Balangoda.. was the first person of consequence who heard about Wijeyratna's claims to have had a former existence. He questioned the boy and his parents. The boy even described some preliminary details regarding his execution. He is also supposed to have said in his previous life that after his execution he will come back to his brother (*i. e.* Tillekeratna Hamy). Tillekeratna Hamy did not wish this to be known as he feared the relations of the murdered woman would wreck vengeance on the boy. Later Mr. Francis Story made more detailed enquiries Professor Ian Stevenson pursued the matter on his arrival in Ceylon. He found that the Supreme Court proceedings of the trial of Ratranhamy corroborates to some extent the story as told by Wijeyratna regarding the cause of his displeasure with his former wife. The medical evidence in the Supreme Court case shows that the murdered woman had, among other injuries, a gaping incised wound 2 1/2" long 1 1/2" broad, just below the left armpit involving the lung. Curiously, Wijeyratne has a prominent hollow in his chest but it is on his right



side under the right armpit. Could this however, be a standing reminder to him of the injury he inflicted on the wife of his previous existence or is it just chance? The fell deed was perpetrated with his right hand. Could the present condition of his right hand and arm be an instance of retributive Karma or is it also just chance? Nevertheless the account the boy gave of his past life to Ven. Ananda Maitreya Maha Thero tallies with what the boy's father had told the Maha Thero and what the local residents are aware of. It may also be mentioned that the present writer himself had made an independent investigation of this case.

An account of this case with his analysis of the recorded evidence and with his comments appears in Professor Ian Stevenson's book "Twenty cases suggestive of reincarnation".

## CHAPTER XV

### SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Now that we have studied the subject of rebirth from many aspects, let us deal with certain questions that usually arise in an attempt to understand rebirth, and which have been asked from the writer at the conclusion of many lectures given by him on this subject.

#### Question 1.

Can you deny the possibility that some of these supposed cases of spontaneous recall of past lives are deliberate fabrications where collected information is put into the mouths of unsuspecting children who are made to repeat such information on being questioned by any one.



## Answer.

As a bare theoretical possibility the answer is, "I cannot deny such a possibility". But, as a practical proposition, to coach up successfully a child with a prepared story of a past life is scarcely possible. In the first instance, the child, for the very reason that it is an unsuspecting child, is easily liable to trip under the skilful cross-examination of trained scientific investigators. Further, in order to give the false rebirth story the appearance of truth, the perpetrator of this fraud must first acquaint himself with numerous details of the life of a person who has actually died elsewhere. This search will have to cover a wide area of events and circumstances connected with the activities of the dead person. If the place of death of this person is in a far off country the task of collecting these numerous details becomes difficult in the extreme, if not almost impossible. Thereafter this vast fund of information has to be imparted into the child-mind without confusing it and, what is more difficult, is to see to it that these details are retained in the child-mind in their proper sequence. If it is the parents of the child who would perpetrate this fraud, many others will have to join in it such as the servants and the neighbours, the relations and associates of the child who are most likely to be aware or to be made aware of the child's references to its past life. The range of cross-examination being wide and varied, the person who fabricates a false story cannot possibly know beforehand all the questions that will be asked and unless all the witnesses are consistent and do not contradict each other, the whole story falls to the ground. The maker of the false story has not only to stage this difficult drama without tell-tale flaws but has also to keep it alive as trained investigators are never satisfied with just one single investigation. Indeed this would be in the nature of a gigantic



conspiracy involving the co-operation of several others and the expenditure of much time, money and energy - and to what purpose? Some might say that the parents would relish some publicity for their child but it must be remembered that the doubtful advantage of such publicity hardly compensates for the stupendous effort involved in staging a false drama which may any moment break down under the keen vigilance of investigators who may any moment re-visit and re-examine the child as well as all the witnesses.

### **Question 2.**

Can rebirth ever take place without anything travelling or passing over from one life to the next?

### **Answer.**

This question assumes that there is already in us something which is capable of travelling or passing over from us at the moment of death. There is the further assumption that this something is stable and unchanging for it has to persist through life if it is to continue on to the next life. The rigid analysis of body and mind as appearing in the Buddhist Texts and briefly indicated in an earlier chapter, shows that every moment every part of the body and mind is undergoing a change leaving no room whatsoever for anything to remain stable and static in view of the relentless Law of Change. As stated in the first chapter, at no point of time is anything not in the process of becoming something else, in view of the Law of Becoming. Something unchanging and stable within the human system is therefore unthinkable.

A question such as the one under consideration arises from the failure to appreciate the silent and imperceptible working of the Law of Cause and Effect. Effect need not



be physically associated with the cause. Effect is merely the result of the cause. When the photograph of a man is taken, has anything travelled from the man to the photograph? When a man stands before the mirror and his image appears in the mirror, has anything travelled from the man to the mirror? It is just a case of effect succeeding cause. Sir William Crooks in his Edinburgh lectures on Mental Science, has said, "It has also been proved by experiments that by an act of the will the mind can cause objects such as metal levers to move." Such is the nature of thought-power. Further, when the causative factor is something mental or psychic, distance is no bar to the operation of the Law of Cause and Effect. In the psychic plane time and distance do not count.

Even consciousness does not travel. The Buddha is reported to have strongly reprimanded a monk called Sāti for saying that the Buddha had declared that consciousness travels from one life to the next (Mahā Taṇhā Sankhaya Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya). It is therefore abundantly clear that nothing need pass from one life to the next to cause that next life to arise. One often does say loosely that a man after death has gone to the Deva-world or to Hell. This is said conventionally for mere convenience of expression just as one would say that the sun rises from the east whereas in reality the sun never rises from the east, nor does a dead man go anywhere. It is only a metaphorical way of expression. Present life is the effect of which past life is the cause. The thoughts, words and deeds of the past life create powerful energies which can condition the arising of the present life.

As stated by Ven. Nyanatiloka in "Karma and Rebirth" (Wheel Publication No. 9) "Thus nothing transmigrates from one life to the next. And what we call our Ego is in reality only this process of continual change, of continual



arising and passing away, moment after moment, day after day, year after year, life after life. Just as a wave that apparently hastens over the surface of the ocean is in reality nothing but a continuous rising and falling of ever new masses of water, each time called forth through the transmission of energy, even so, closely considered, is there in the ultimate sense no permanent ego entity that passes through the ocean of Samsara, but merely a process of physical and mental phenomena takes place ever and anon, being whipped up by the impulse and will for life." Energy does not travel from place to place but can cease to manifest in one place and commence to manifest itself in another place.

### **Question 3.**

If nothing passes from one life to the next, is the reborn individual identical with the individual who had died? Is he the same as the one who died or is he someone else?

### **Answer**

There is no identity of personality between the two individuals, in the sense that neither the body (*rūpa*) nor the mind (*nāma*) of the dying individual is present in the reborn individual. There is however this important fact not to be overlooked which makes it difficult entirely to disconnect the dying individual from the reborn individual. We have learnt that the mind (*nāma*) is not a permanent unchanging entity. It is not something fixed or static. It is dynamic. It is a process, a series (*santati*) or flow of mental states each following the other with such rapidity that it appears or seems to be something permanent whereas in reality it is not. We have studied how this process of changing from one mental state to another does not end with death. As a result of the cessation of the terminal mental state at the moment of death another mental state arises (*Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa*) though in a different plane or place. This is possible because thoughts



are forces or energies and cannot perish with the body on account of the principle of conservation of energy. Thus the process of change continues. Thus there is a continuity of the mental part (nama) of the dying individual. The terminal mental state of the dying individual and the initial mental state of the individual reborn belong to the same current of cause and effect. Hence it would not be accurate to say that there is no identity whatsoever between the two individuals. At the same time, merely to state that there is identity, can lead to a number of misconceptions.

The best answer to this question as to whether the two individuals are the same is the answer given by Nagasena. Thera to King Milinda in respect of this same question - "na ca sō na ca añño" - "Not the same, yet not another". There are some who remark that this answer is no answer but an elusive quibbling with words. Such a remark is inconsiderate and undeserved. It is not every question that can be satisfactorily answered with a categorical "yes" or "no". As Nagasena Thera on that occasion asked, "Is the flame of the lighted candle in the second watch of the night identical with the flame in the third watch of the night"? Neither "yes" nor "no" will explain the situation. When a child becomes in the course of time an old man, would you say that the old man is identical with the child? Can you explain the situation by a mere "yes" or "no"? Here too is it not more satisfactory to say, "na ca sō na ca añño" - "Not the same, yet not another"? There is however sufficient identity between the child and the old man to fix moral responsibility on the old man for the acts of the child. Similarly there is sufficient identity between the dying individual and the reborn individual to establish the latter's responsibility for the acts of the former. As stated in the Visuddhi Magga (Ch. 17) — "with a stream of continuity there is neither identity nor otherness. For if there were



absolute identity in a stream of continuity, there would be no forming of curd from milk. And yet if there were absolute otherness the curd would not be derived from the milk. And so too with all causally arisen things. So neither absolute identity nor absolute otherness should be assumed here" (Ven Nāṇamoli Thero's translation).

#### **Question 4.**

If every death is followed by a birth, the world's population should be constant, but how is it that, as everyone knows, the world's population is fast increasing year by year.?

#### **Answer.**

It is perfectly true that the world's population is fast increasing. It is also perfectly true that every death is followed by a birth. There is however nothing inconsistent between these two statements, when we consider the following:

1. Rebirth can take place not only in this world (whose population only we can count) but in countless other world systems of which the Buddhist texts speak.

2. Rebirth does not necessarily mean that the preceding death was in a human plane. An animal or a celestial-being dying can be reborn as a human being.

3. Similarly a death does not necessarily mean that the succeeding rebirth is in a human plane. A man dying can be reborn as an animal or a god.

#### **Question 5.**

If it is the nature of the last conscious thought of the dying man that determines the place and conditions of his next life, it can so happen that a man who is generally good



may happen to entertain a very bad thought at the dying moment as a result of which he is reborn under very bad circumstances. Has all the earlier good he had done, passed for nought?

**Answer.**

Although the nature of the last thought generally speaking, determines the nature of the next birth it does not mean that all the earlier thoughts and deeds do not exert their influence on the reborn individual. The last thought before death, being the very last must necessarily exert the first influence on the being-to-be. This does not prevent the earlier thoughts and deeds from exerting their influence later on the new life. The illustration is usually given of an enclosure full of cattle. An old and weary bull happens to be just by the gate of the enclosure which is locked, while younger and stronger bulls are found at the rear of the enclosure. As soon as the gate is opened, the old bull will come out first and will walk away ahead of the younger ones but in the long run the younger bulls will overtake the old bull. Similarly the good or bad thoughts that occupy the mind when one is at death's door (Asanna Kamma) will have immediate effect but the earlier thoughts and deeds will in due course produce their effects. At the same time it must be remembered as indicated earlier that the effects of Garuka Kamma (Weighty Kamma) take precedence over Asanna Kamma (Death-proximate Kamma or Terminal Kamma).

**Question 6.**

Is there such a close and immediate connection between death and rebirth that there is no time-lapse between the two? If that be so, then the position would be that death is birth and birth is death. Is that correct?



## Answer.

Certain schools of thought believe that there is an intermediate state (antarabhava) but according to Theravāda Buddhism there is no such state at all because death and birth are part of one process. Immediately after the cessation of Cuti Citta (Death consciousness) the Paṭisandhi Citta (Relinking Consciousness) arises. The cessation of the Maraṇāsanna Javana Citta and the Cuti Citta is necessarily followed by the arising of the Paṭisandhi Viññāṇa. A death here means a birth elsewhere. What disappears here, appears elsewhere. A gate is both an exit gate and an entrance gate according to the standpoint of the observer. If he sees anyone coming out of it he regards it as an exit gate. But if some other observer sees the same man entering through that gate, to that observer it is an entrance gate, yet in both cases it was the same gate that was made use of. According to Buddhism birth and death are merely communicating doors from one life to another, the continuous process of consciousness being the medium uniting the different lives of man. As Dahlke says:- "Dying is nothing but a back-ward view of birth, and birth is nothing but a forward view of death. In truth, both are the same, a phase of unbroken grasping." Dahlke takes up the case of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly and says:- "In the face of the miracles of birth and death, science strongly resembles a boy making his first observations in natural history. Finding in his glass-case the caterpillar dead and the butterfly born, he will say, "Two miracles!". The old has died and something new has made its appearance". Instead of both facts merging into one another in a true conception of what has taken place, to his mistaken notion they fall apart from one another and become problems defying solution. Even so is it with science. Through her failure to recognize that



the facts of death here and birth there are forms of one and the same experience instead of a single comprehension of both under the one aspect, two miracles are found by her to be present. On this point the physicist has already left the stage of childhood behind. Today he no longer says, - "Two miracles! Heat is gone and motion is present". He has found the clue albeit it is true, only in the form of reaction. The biologist however still remains incapable of replacing two miracles with a true and genuine conception. He is still unaware that it is with dying that being born must be purchased. Hence he treats birth as a fact by itself and death as a fact by itself and so remains confronting both problems internally insoluble" ("Buddhism and Science")

### **Question 7**

Why are we unable to recall our past lives if indeed we had past lives? If we had past lives, we surely ought to be able to recall them?

### **Answer**

The general rule seems to be that death, being an obliterating agent, a reborn person is mentally incapable of recalling his past life. This is nature's protection for it certainly is confusing if past memories keep crowding into a reborn person's present mind when he has to keep abreast of present-life conditions. There is a case of a younger brother who had died and was reborn as his elder brother's son who persisted in addressing his present father as brother, much to the father's embarrassment and despite severe scoldings and warnings from relations not to address a father as a brother. Even his mental attitude towards his father may not be the same as that of a normal son towards his father.



But why is our inability to recall our past lives taken to mean that we never had past lives? To those who argue thus, one would like to pose the question - "Which of us can remember the facts of our earliest infancy, let alone a previous life"? Which of us can remember being born? Does this mean that there was no early infancy for us, or that we were not born at all? The fact is that at the time of birth and also in early infancy our minds for the most part were existing in the Bhavanga or unconscious state and not in the fully conscious state. Even during day a newborn infant is for the most part sleeping. Human memory is not a perfect faculty. Even adults may forget an incident within a few days of its occurrence, but this does not mean that that incident did not occur. All incidents and events if they once made their impressions on the conscious Vithi Citta are never lost even if the impressions have faded from the conscious Vithi Citta because they have sunk into the unconscious Bhavanga from where under certain circumstances with the proper technique they can be recalled. These are the cases discussed in Ch. XII. Then there are cases of spontaneous recall of past lives without the intervention of hypnosis. These are discussed in Ch. XIII. When a recall is possible and when it is not, is not yet known.

### Question 8

The doctrine of rebirth postulates not one previous birth but innumerable previous births. That being so, where is the start of this series of successive births? Why is the Doctrine of Dependent Origination represented as a round of births and deaths and not as a straight line of successive births and deaths in which case we would be able to see the starting point of this line of births and deaths? In other words is there no First Cause?



## Answer,

When the Buddha promulgated his Dhamma, it was not his purpose to explain the origin of life or the beginning of the world. His one purpose was to explain to suffering mankind the universal malady of Dukkha (disharmony) and to prescribe a remedy thereto. This he felt was the most pressing need for all time. He sought to show a way of escape from the bondage of suffering. Anything outside this was irrelevant for his purpose as can be judged from this statement of his :—

“Dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi  
Dukkhasa ca nirodham”

“One thing only do I teach  
Sorrow and its End to reach”.

*(Majjhima Nikaya Part I Sutta 22)*

In conformity with this limited purpose he chose not to indulge in metaphysical theories and abstractions about the origin of life and the beginning of the world—matters which have no bearing on the aim and object of life as shown by him. According to him, the one purpose of life is to develop ourselves morally (sīla), develop the mental powers of concentration (samādhi) and by such aid obtain that higher vision (paññā) whereby one will be able to see things as they actually are (yathā bhūtanāna - Reality) and so be released from this life of suffering. Therefore, of all the facts that comprise life’s entirety, he brought out only such as are necessary for the realization of this goal.

**Why the doctrine of Rebirth has no reference to a First Cause.** When the Buddha spoke on Rebirth it was only for the purpose of showing that the consequences of our deeds in this life will follow us to a life hereafter and that we should therefore be careful and selective in regard to what



we think or say or do. In the same way when he spoke of previous births he was only seeking to explain that our condition in this life, our joys and our sorrows, our opportunities and our impediments are often the results of our deeds in our previous lives. His was essentially a practical purpose and therefore he was not in the least interested to pursue further the process of rebirth and enter into philosophical abstractions.

**Why the Doctrine of Dependent Origination has no reference to a First Cause.** As with the Doctrine of Rebirth, so is it with the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paṭicca Sammuppāda). This doctrine profound in its significance and difficult of comprehension sets out a series of 12 conditions or states or factors existing in various modes of dependence on each other and forming as it were a round or cycle of conditioning (paccaya) and conditioned (paccuppana) factors and showing a great and important process that is in existence. These 12 factors are ceaselessly in operation and since this is a process of dependent origination, every condition arises as a result of some other condition and proceeds on into yet another condition. The factors that constitute the process are related to each other not so much through the medium of cause as through the medium of conditionality or dependence. Conditionality then is the pattern of this process. (Paṭicca means conditional on or dependent on; Samuppāda means arising together). This is hardly the place to expound the profound doctrine of Dependent Origination but for the purpose of giving a full answer to the question propounded it is relevant to state that by this doctrine the Buddha sought to point out the twofold manner in which this process works - the forward manner which leads to repeated births and suffering and the reverse manner which leads to the cessation of repeated births and suffering and which finally leads to the cessation of



existence with all its suffering and sorrow. He was keen on pointing out to us that it is left to us to choose the direction in which the process should work in us.

The principle underlying this doctrine can be expressed thus in very simple and general terms without reference to the particular 12 factors :— “**Imasmim sati, idam hōti** - when this exists that exists. **Imassa uppādā idam uppajjati** - when this arises that arises”. In the reverse order this principle works thus—“**Imasmim asati idam na hōti**—when this is not that is not. **Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati**—When this ceases that ceases”. (Cūla Sakaludāyi Sutta. Majjhima Nikāya 79). We thus have a principle of conditionality, relativity and interdependence. This principle is of universal applicability but the Buddha was concerned with applying this principle to explain the process of life and also to show how the process can be made to cease. The twelve factors which arise each dependent on the preceding factor are—

**Avijjā** - Ignorance

**Sankhārā** - Volitional activities.

**Viññāṇa** or **Paṭisandhiviññāṇa** - Rebirth consciousness  
or relinking - consciousness

**Nāma-rūpa** - Mind-body combination.

**Salāyatna** - Six spheres or avenues of sense.

**Phassa** - Contact

**Vedanā** - Feeling

**Taṇhā** - Craving

**Upādāna** - Grasping or Clinging

**Bhava** or **Kamma Bhava** - The process of **Becoming** or  
Activities

**Jāti** - Birth

**Jarā** - **Marāṇa** - Decay and death.



These are the factors that are ceaselessly in operation in the long course of man's existence in Samsara showing the endless rounds of births and deaths. This is the process that goes on and on. The first two factors refer to the causative conditions in the past life (*atīta hetu*). The next five factors refer to effects in the present life (*vattamāna phala*). The next two refer to the causative conditions in the present life (*vattamāna hetu*) and the last two refer to effects in the future life (*anāgata phala*).

Since Ignorance (*Avijjā*) is the root cause of all Sorrows, sufferings and disharmonies prevailing in the life-process and is a continuing cause, the Buddha in outlining the process made a start with ignorance (*avijjā*) but it must not be taken to mean that Ignorance (*avijjā*) is the primary origin of life or of the world. Buddha considered *Avijja* (Ignorance) to be a sufficient starting point to understand the process of life and to find a way out of it. Since *Avijja* itself is conditioned by *Sāṅkhāra* and since *Saṅkha* is in turn conditioned by *Avijja*, since birth follows death and death follows birth, the process can best be represented by a circle and not by a straight line. The twelve factors of the process are like twelve spokes in a wheel. You can start considering the process from any one spoke in a wheel, regarding each spoke as a factor but you will come back to that spoke again. The process works in cyclic order. It is like a revolving wheel.

### **Buddha's View about a First Cause.**

When a monk called *Mālunkya*putta had criticized the Buddha for his failure to elucidate these metaphysical problems as to whether the world is eternal or not eternal, or whether the world is finite or infinite, and declared that he will not lead the Holy Life until these matters were clarified, the Buddha calmly questioned this monk and obtained his reply



that his adoption of the Holy Life was not conditional on the Buddha's clarification of these problems. The Buddha then admonished this foolish monk in the following manner. "It is as if Mālunkyaputta, a person were pierced by an arrow thickly smeared with poison and his friends and relatives were to procure a surgeon and then this person were to say - I will not have this arrow taken out until I have the details of the person by whom I was wounded, the nature of the arrow with which I was pierced etc. That person would die, Mālunkyaputta, before this would ever be known to him". Then the Buddha went on to explain why these metaphysical problems were not dealt with by him. "Mālunkyaputta, I have not revealed whether the world is eternal or not eternal, whether the world is finite or infinite, because these are not profitable, do not concern the bases of holiness, are not conducive to aversion to dispassion to cessation, to tranquility, to intuitive wisdom, to enlightenment or to Nibbana. Therefore I have not revealed them" (Cūla Mālunkaya Sutta. Majjhima Nikāya 63).

In the Anamatagga Sutta of the Samyutta Nikāya, the Buddha has maintained that the primary origin of life is something inconceivable. "Anamataggō'yam Bhikkhava samsāro, pubbakōti napannāyati avijjān'varanānam sattānam taṇhānam vōjanānam sandhāvataṃ". "Inconceivable, brethren, is the origin of this faring on. The earliest point of this faring on of beings cloaked in Ignorance and bound by craving is not to be perceived".

According to the Buddhist view referred to earlier, nothing arises from a single cause. This is because all things, all states, are both conditioning and also conditioned and are therefore inter-dependent. No single event in this universe can remain isolated and unconnected with some other event in some respect or other. Therefore a cause by



**itself cannot stand.** it must arise from other causes and conditions and not from one isolated and unconnected cause, there being always a complexity of inter-related and inter-dependent causes and conditions. Hence a First Cause originating by itself is unthinkable. It can be a concept. It can be accepted on blind faith but it can never be recognised through the channels of reason and experience.

### **Views of great thinkers about a First-Cause.**

The well-known philosopher Joad in "The Meaning of Life" says:- "The universe, we say, is not and cannot be interpreted in terms of one fundamental principle and one only. Two principles at least are required to account for the phenomena of plurality and diversity".

Another well-known thinker, Aldous Huxley, in "Ends and Means" says:- "To refer phenomena back to a First Cause has ceased to be fashionable at least in the west..... we shall never succeed in changing our age of iron into an age of gold until we give up our ambition to find a single cause for all our ills and instead admit the existence of many causes acting simultaneously or intricate correlations and reduplicated actions and reactions".

Yet another well known thinker Bertrand Russel in "Why I am not a Christian" says:—"There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is due to the poverty of our imagination".

From the earliest dawn of civilization thinking man has struggled ceaselessly to discover a first beginning of all things but without success. Whatever First Cause is assumed, there will immediately arise the very pertinent question, "What is the Cause of that cause?"



## Question 9

Is the belief in life after death confined to Buddhists only? Did such a belief exist prior to the advent of Buddhism?

The belief in a life after death is by no means confined to Buddhists only. This belief is one of great antiquity and existed among the Egyptians and later among the Greeks, the Romans and the Brahmins, long prior to the advent of Buddhism. There is however an important difference between the beliefs of non-Buddhists and the belief of Buddhists on this matter. The non-Buddhist belief is based on the assumed existence of a soul within man which is said to be able to travel or transmigrate from one life to another, and the word used in this connection is not rebirth but reincarnation. The Buddhist belief is that nothing travels from one life to another nor is there any such unchanging stable static thing as soul. Hence the Pali word to denote rebirth is "Punabbhava" which literally means "an existence again". It is not difficult to comprehend rebirth if the existence of a soul is accepted, whereas the Buddhist theory of rebirth is difficult of comprehension since Buddhism admits of no soul and strongly denies that anything travels from one life to another. People of various religious systems and creeds have shared the belief in a life after death. The ancient Egyptians believed in it and it is said that the reason why they embalmed a dead body and placed on it some of the food and clothing the dead man was fond of during his lifetime, was to prevent his "Ka" or soul from taking another body. The reason no doubt is absurd but this custom indicates the prevalence of a belief in a life after death. In the 6th Century B. C. this belief found expression in the writings of the Greek



Pherecydes, Empedocles and Pythagoras. Later Plato expressed the same view in his "De Republica". The Roman poet Ovid in his "Metamorphoses" has given an account of reincarnation. Julius Ceasar in his "De Bello Gallico" Book VI while giving an account of the customs and manners of Gallia (ancient France) which he had conquered, refers to the prevalence of this belief.

The religion in India before the advent of Buddhism was Brahamanism which in its later Upanishadic stage also taught the reincarnation of beings.

In early Christianity the idea of reincarnation appears to have existed although Jesus Christ never directly taught it nor repudiated it. In the Old Testament here and there are passages where the idea of reincarnation is dimly referred to (e.g. The Psalms 126), while in the New Testament (St. Mark 9 and St. Matthews 17), there is a reference to John the Baptist being a reincarnation of Elijah. That the belief in reincarnation was prevalent during time of Jesus Christ is seen from a question put to Jesus Chirst and referred to in St. John 9. It is also seen from the answers given by his disciples to certain questions put to them by Jesus Christ (St. Matthew 16 and St. Luke 9).

St Augustine in his "Confessions" has strongly upheld this doctrine. So did his pupil Origen in "De Principiis" and "Contra Celsus" Origen used to preach this doctrine wherever he went. While the early Christian church accepted this doctrine, the later church fathers so strongly disapproved of it that at a meeting of the Council of Constantinople specially convened in A.D. 553, the doctrine was formally rejected as no more being a part of the Christian religion. (Vide Catholic Encyclopedia, 1909 Edition pages 236 and 237.)



As a result of this decision, Christian belief in Reincarnation died down, but from about the 19th Century the belief steadily gained ground. W. E. Atkinson and several others began to write about Reincarnation. Poets of the eminence of Wordsworth, Tennyson, Longfellow and Masefield have expressed this belief and in the present century an English clergyman of note, Rev. Leslie Weatherhead delivered a lecture which was published in book form entitled "The case for Reincarnation".

### **Question 10.**

Beyond an intellectual satisfaction that certain truths hitherto accepted on faith have been established beyond doubt, of what benefit are the researches of rebirth — investigators to those who are not so interested.

### **Answer.**

That is a narrow view of the matter. The truth of rebirth is of great consequence to all. There is hardly a man in whom there is no yearning to know whence he came and whither he is bound. The yearning is no doubt more marked in those who are educated but even in the untutored mind at least occasionally and dimly this yearning makes its presence felt, especially on occasions like the sudden death of a near and dear relative. This is not an intellectual quest. It is a natural urge. It is a natural prompting of the heart to look for something that can explain the mystery of life and death. When it is satisfactorily understood that life did not for the first time commence here in this existence, that this present life with its sorrows and joys, its anxieties and hopes, its losses and gains is the logical outcome of a previous life in accordance with the great principle of action and reaction, then life is no more an enigma or a puzzle



Life is then seen to have a meaning and a purpose. Life then assumes a serious importance not hitherto recognized. Life no more appears to be a dreary round of events and circumstances. New hopes are felt. New visions are opened up. There will be a complete reorientation of his views on life as he begins to awaken to the realization that it is he who steers the ship of his destiny and that it is he who is the builder of his future life. When he keenly realizes that every thought, word and deed of his contributes to the building up of his future life he will learn to be more and more selective regarding the thoughts he thinks, the words he utters and the actions he performs. If he has led a good life, death will have no fears for him. He can cheerfully and confidently look forward to a happy experience in the life hereafter. If he has led a bad life he will still have the consolation that Kamma is not a finished product but is something always in the making, and that the effects of bad actions can be modified and altered by present good actions. Indeed, he will be happy in the thought that he still has a chance to reconstruct his life and that any such attempt commenced in good earnest but left undone owing to the intervention of death will have a chance of being taken up again in the life hereafter.

An understanding of rebirth will, not only induce a refining influence on one's own life, it will also refine his attitude towards all sentient beings without a single exception since he will realize that all are his fellow-passengers in the great journey of life, subject to the same universal laws and fundamental principles to which he himself is subject. He will always be ready and willing to give a helping hand



to one who needs his help. He will always forgive his enemies. He may hate the sin but he will forgive the sinner. He will habitually wish all beings well.

**SABBE SATTA BHAVANTU SUKHITATTA**

**MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY.**



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# THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH

Bhikkhu Khantipalo





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**THIS INDEED HAS BEEN SAID BY THE  
EXALTED ONE :**

Two knowable dhammas should be thoroughly known—mind and body; two knowable dhammas should be relinquished—unknowing and craving for existence; two knowable dhammas should be realized—wisdom and freedom; two knowable dhammas should be developed—calm and insight.

**Eight are the bases of unknowing :**

Non-comprehension in dukkha, non-comprehension in dukkha's arising; non-comprehension in dukkha's cessation, non-comprehension in the practice-path leading to dukkha's cessation, non-comprehension in the past, non-comprehension in the future, non-comprehension in past and future, non-comprehension in Dependent Arising.

**Eight are the bases of knowledge :**

Comprehension in dukkha, comprehension in dukkha's arising, comprehension in dukkha's cessation, comprehension in the practice-path leading to dukkha's cessation, comprehension in the past, comprehension in the future, comprehension in past and future, comprehension in Dependent Arising.

Peace it is and Excellence it is, that is to say—the stilling of all conditions, the rejection of all substrates (for rebirth), the destruction of craving, passionlessness, cessation, Nibbāna.



O bhikkhus, there is that sphere where is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air, nor the sphere of infinite space; nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of no-thingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; not this world, nor another world, neither the moon nor the sun.

That I say, O bhikkhus, is indeed neither coming nor going nor staying, not passing-away and not arising. Unsupported, unmoving, devoid of object—that indeed is the end of dukkha.

And this dhamma is profound, hard to see, hard to awaken to, peaceful, excellent, beyond logic, subtle and to be experienced by the wise.

*(Translated from the Royal Chanting Book (Suat Mon Chabub Luang) compiled by H.H., the 9th Sangharāja of Siam, Sā Pussadevo, and printed at Mahāmakut Press, Bangkok).*



# THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH

## Introduction

Upon the Full Moon of the month of Visākha, now more than two thousand five hundred years ago, the religious wanderer known as Gotama, formerly Prince Siddhattha and heir to the throne of the Sakiyan peoples, by his full insight into the Truth called Dhamma which is this mind and body, became the One Perfectly Enlightened by himself.

His Enlightenment or Awakening called Sambodhi abolished in himself unknowing and craving, destroyed greed, aversion and delusion in his heart, so that “vision arose, super-knowledge arose, wisdom arose, discovery arose, light arose”—a total penetration into the mind and body, its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation which was at the same time complete understanding of the ‘world’, its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation. He penetrated to the Truth underlying all existence. In meditative concentration throughout one night, but after years of striving, from being a seeker, He became “the One-who-Knows, the One-who-Sees”.

When He came to explain His great discovery to others, He did so in various ways suited to the understanding of those who listened and suited to help relieve the problems with which they were burdened.



He knew with His Great Wisdom exactly what these were even if his listeners were not aware of them, and out of His Great Compassion taught Dhamma for those who wished to lay down their burdens. The burdens which men, indeed all beings, carry round with them are no different now from the Buddha-time. For then as now men were burdened with unknowing and craving. They did not know of the Four Noble Truths nor of Dependent Arising and they craved for fire and poison and were then as now, consumed by fears. Lord Buddha, One attained to the Secure, has said :

“Profound, Ānanda, is this Dependent Arising, and it appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this law that the world resembles a tangled skein of thread, a woven nest of birds, a thicket of bamboos and reeds, that man does not escape from (birth in) the lower realms of existence, from the states of woe and perdition, and suffers from the round of rebirth.”

The not-understanding of Dependent Arising is the root of all sorrows experienced by all beings. It is also the most important of the formulations of Lord Buddha's Enlightenment. For a Buddhist it is therefore most necessary to see into the heart of this for oneself. This is done not by reading about it nor by becoming expert in scriptures, nor by speculations upon one's own and others' concepts but by seeing Dependent Arising in one's own life and by coming to grips with it through calm and insight in one's 'own' mind and body.

“He who sees Dependent Arising, he sees Dhamma”.



Let us now see how this Teaching is concerned with our own lives. The search of every living being is to find happiness, in whatever state, human or non-human, they find themselves. But what it is really important to know is this: *the factors which give rise to unhappiness, so that they can be avoided; and the factors from which arise happiness, so that they can be cultivated.* This is just another way of stating the Four Noble Truths. In the first half of this statement there is *unhappiness* or what is never satisfactory, called in Pāli language, Dukkha.

This Dukkha is the first Noble Truth which we experience *all the time*, usually without noticing it, which does not make the dukkha any less! First, there is *occasional dukkha*: birth, old age, disease and death, for these events usually do not compose the whole of life. Then we have *frequent dukkha*: being united with what one dislikes, being separated from what one likes, not getting what one wants, and this is everyday experience. Finally, as a summary of all kinds of dukkha there is *continuous dukkha*: the five grasped-at groups, that is to say body, feeling, perceptions, volitions (and other mental activity) and consciousness, the components of a human being. Explanation of these in full would take too long here but all the readers are provided with these kinds of dukkha in themselves. They should look to see whether these facts of experience are delightful or not. This Dhamma “should be thoroughly known” in one’s own person and life, that is where the first Noble Truth may be discovered.

Then *the factors which give rise to unhappiness* were mentioned. Here again one’s person and life should be investigated. Now when living creatures are killed



intentionally by me, when I take what is not given, when I indulge in wrong conduct in sexual relations, when I speak false words and when I take intoxicating drinks and drugs producing carelessness—now are these things factors for happiness or unhappiness? When I covet the belongings of others, when I allow ill-will to dwell in my heart, and when I have as the tenants of my heart ignorance, delusion, and views which lead astray—is this for my welfare or destruction? There are many ways of describing these factors which make for unhappiness but all of them derive from unknowing and craving which are just two sides of the same thing. This is the second Noble Truth of the Arising of Dukkha. When craving is at work, when unknowing clouds one's understanding, then one is sure to experience dukkha. Lord Buddha instructs us for our own benefit and for the happiness of others, that this craving "should be relinquished".

Now *happiness* in the second half of the statement above can be of many kinds. Two kinds dependent upon conditions can be seen illustrated by the world, while one kind, unsupported by conditions "should be realized" in one's own heart. We are all looking for happiness so let us see what is needed for it. First, there is materially produced happiness. This is born of possessions and jugglery with conditions of life 'out there'. Called *āmisā-sukha* in Pāli, this happiness is most uncertain; for all the factors supporting it are subject to instability and change. Moreover, they are out in the world and not in one's own heart, so that they call for expert jugglery to save one from dukkha. And failure and disappointment cannot be avoided if one goes after this sort of happiness. So



this sort of happiness is short-lived and precarious. A great improvement on this is the happiness which comes from practising Dhamma, called non-material happiness or *nirāmisa-sukha*. This kind of happiness is made sure whenever a person performs wholesome kamma, such as doing the following ten things: giving, moral conduct, mind-development, reverence, helpfulness, dedicating meritorious acts to others, rejoicing in the meritorious acts of others, hearkening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma, and setting upright one's views. People who practise this Dhamma, purifying their hearts in this way, are sure to reap happiness. But this happiness, though more lasting than the first, is not to be relied upon forever. As a fruit of it one may dwell among the gods for aeons, or be born as a very fortunate man but even the gods have to pass away, let alone man. And the fruits of kamma, good or evil, are impermanent, so it cannot be relied upon to produce a permanent happiness. This can only be found by removing entirely the cause for *dukkha*: when craving is uprooted no growth of *dukkha* can take place. On the contrary, with purity, compassion and wisdom one has reached the Supreme Happiness of *Nibbāna* which is stable, indestructible and never subject to changing conditions. This is the Third Noble Truth of the Cessation of *Dukkha* by the removal of its cause. A good deal of hard work is needed to get to this "which should be realized", and that work must be done along the right lines, hence the Fourth Noble Truth.

This is called the Truth of the Path, "which should be cultivated". It comprises elements of wisdom: Right View and Right Attitude; elements of moral conduct: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood; and



clements of meditation: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness. These will not be explained in detail here.\* It is certain that any one who practises Moral Conduct, Collectedness and Wisdom in his life has the conditions which sustain happiness. From his practice he may have Dhamma-happiness or the Supreme Happiness, according to the degree he practices, for the latter requires well-developed meditation both in calm and in insight.

These Four Noble Truths—Dukkha, Cause, Cessation, and Path are the heart of the Dhamma and they are in the heart of every man who cares to see them. From their seeing and understanding comes happiness but by trying to escape them only more misery is born.

These Truths are illustrated by the formula of Dependent Arising which is found elaborated in various ways. The simplest form is this:

Craving being, dukkha is; by the arising of craving, dukkha arises: craving not being, dukkha is not; by the cessation of craving, dukkha ceases.

But Dependent Arising can be given in much more detailed ways than this. The important principle to understand is that whatever is experienced by us, all that arises due to many conditions. An aspect which will be easy to understand concerns this body which grows in size from birth through youth, which develops certain characteristics in maturity, and as old age creeps on becomes infirm in various ways, and finally dies. The processes which govern this growth and decline are of great complexity and interdependence. The body, to keep

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\* See Wheel No. 34/35: The Four Noble Truths.



going at all, needs clothes, food, shelter and medicines at least. But once the internal chemistry (also dependently originated) starts the process leading to old age and death, none of the exterior supporting conditions can do more than retard the process for a little while. The body, as a whole, does not arise from 'no-cause' (the physical particles and kamma being its immediate causes); nor is it derived from *one* cause. If examined, nothing which we experience arises from only one, or no cause at all; on the contrary our experience all arises dependently. Sight is actually dependent on the eye as base, the object to be seen, and the operation of eye-consciousness. (There are other factors that also contribute: light, air.....) Similarly, there is ear, sound, ear-consciousness; nose, smell, nose-consciousness; tongue, taste, tongue-consciousness; body, touch, body-consciousness; and mind, thoughts, mind-consciousness. All of our experience falls within these eighteen elements and there is nothing which we know outside them.

It is also important to understand that much of what one experiences arising dependently is the fruit of one's own actions. The happiness one feels and the dukkha one feels, although sometimes brought about by events in the physical world (landslides, earthquakes, a sunny or a rainy day), is very often brought about by one's own past intentional actions or kamma. And in the present time with each deliberate action, one performs more kammas which will come to fruit as experience in the future. So, if one wants to experience the fruits of happiness, the seeds of happiness must be planted now. They may fruit immediately, in this life, or in a future existence. We make ourselves, we are the creators of ourselves, no one else has a hand in this creation. And



the Lord of Creation is no other than Ignorance or Un-knowing. He is the Creator of this Wheel of Samsāra, of continued and infinitely varied forms of dukkha. And this Lord resides in the hearts of all men who are called 'ordinary-men'. We shall return to this in more detail later.

### The History of the Wheel.

Dependent Arising is explained many times and in many different connections in the Discourses of Lord Buddha, but He has not compared it to a wheel. This simile is found in the Visuddhimagga ("The Path of Purification") and in the other commentarial literature. Although Theravāda tradition has many references to this simile, it does not seem to have been depicted at all. But in Northern India and especially in Kashmir, the Sarvāstivāda school\* was strongly established and besides producing a vast literature upon Discipline and the Further Dhamma (Vinaya and Abhidhamma), they produced also a way of depicting a great many important Buddhist teachings by this picture of the Wheel which is the subject of the present essay.

In Pāli it is the *Bhava-cakka* or *Samsāra-cakka*, which is variously rendered in English as the Wheel of Life, the Wheel of Becoming or the Wheel of Rebirth.

In their collections of stories about Lord Buddha and his disciples (known as *Avadāna*), there is one which opens with the story of this wheel. Readers will observe that the story refers to Lord Buddha's lifetime and says that He has authorized the painting of this picture, as well as laying down its contents. It is certain that in the

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\* one of the eighteen branches of extinct Hīnayāna.



Buddha-time painting was well known (it is mentioned several times in the Discourses and the Discipline) while the other facts given in this short introductory story are quite in accord with the spirit of the Pāli Discourses. Even the collection of stories in which this account is contained was compiled, according to some scholars, before the Christian era. So if one does not believe that this painting was ordained by Lord Buddha, still it has an age of two thousand years, a venerable tradition indeed. Of all 'teaching-aids' this expression of Buddhist skilful-means (upāya-kosalla), must surely be the oldest. Now let us turn to the story.

### **The Translation**

"Lord Buddha was staying at Rājagaha\*, in the Bamboo Grove, at the Squirrels' Feeding-place. Now, it was the practice of Venerable Mahāmoggallāna to frequent the hells for a certain time, then the animal-kingdom, and also to visit the ghosts, the gods and men. Having seen all the sufferings to be found in the hells which beings there experience as they arise and pass away, such as maiming, dismembering and so forth; having witnessed how animals kill and devour others, how ghosts are tormented by hunger and thirst, how the gods lose (their heavenly state), fall (from it), are spoiled and come to their ruin, and how men crave and come to naught but thwarted desires,—having seen all this he returned to Jambudipa (India) and reported this to the four assemblies. Whatever (venerable one) had a fellow-bhikkhu or a bhikkhu-pupil leading the holy life with dissatisfaction, he would take him to Venerable Mahāmoggallāna (thinking) : 'The Venerable Mahāmoggallāna

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\* the familiar Pāli forms of names are used throughout.



will exhort and teach him well'. And (truly) the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna would exhort and teach him well. Such (dissatisfied bhikkhus) would again lead the holy life with keen interest, even distinguishing themselves with the higher attainments since they had been taught and exhorted so well by the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna.

At that time (when the Lord stayed at Rājagaha), the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna was surrounded by the four assemblies consisting of bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, pious laymen and women.

Now the illustrious Enlightened Ones who Know, (also) ask questions. Thus Lord Buddha asked the Venerable Ānanda (why the second of His foremost disciples was surrounded by the four assemblies). Venerable Ānanda then related Venerable Mahāmoggallāna's experiences and said that he instructed discontented bhikkhus with success.

( The Lord replied ; ) 'The Elder Moggallāna or a bhikkhu like him cannot be at many places (at the same time for teaching people). Therefore, in the (monastery) gateways a wheel having five sections should be made'.

Thus the Lord laid down that a wheel with five sections should be made (whereupon it was remarked :) 'But the bhikkhus do not know what sort of wheel should be made'.

The Lord explained: 'The five bourns should be represented—the hellish bourn, that of the animal kingdom, of ghosts, of men, and the bourn of the gods. In the lower portion (of the wheel), the hells are to be shown, together, with the animal-kingdom and the realm of the ghosts, while in the upper portion gods and men



should be represented. The four continents should also be depicted, namely, Pūbbavideha, Aparagoyāna, Uttarakuru and Jambudīpa.\* In the middle, greed, aversion and delusion must be shown, a dove symbolizing greed,\*\* a snake representing aversion, and a hog, delusion. Furthermore, the Buddhas are to be painted (surrounded by their) haloes pointing out (the way to) Nibbāna. Ordinary beings should be shown as by the contrivance of a water-wheel they sink (to lower states) and rise up again. The space around the rim should be filled with (scenes teaching) the twelve links of Dependent Arising in the forward and reversed order. (The picture of the Wheel) must show clearly that everything, all the time, is swallowed by impermanence and the following two verses should be added as an inscription.

Make a start, leave behind (the wandering-on)  
firmly concentrate upon the Buddha's Teaching.  
As He, Leader like an elephant, did Nālāgiri rout,  
so should you rout and defeat the hosts of Death.  
Whoever in this Dhamma-Vinaya will go his way  
ever vigilant and always striving hard,  
Can make an end of dukkha here  
and leave behind Samsāra's wheel of birth and death.

Thus, at the instance of the bhikkhus, it was laid down by the Lord that the Wheel of Wandering-on (in birth and death) with five sections should be made in the gateways (of monasteries).

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\* These have not been shown in the accompanying drawing and neither does modern Tibetan tradition represent them. They are, respectively the eastern, western, northern and southern continents of the old Indian geography.

\*\* In modern representations a cock is always shown.



Now brahmins and householders would come and ask: 'Revered Sir, what is this painting about?'

Bhikkhus would reply: 'We also do not know !'

Thereupon the Lord advised: 'A bhikkhu should be appointed (to receive) visitors in the gateway and to show them (the mural)'.

Bhikkhus were appointed without due consideration (to be guest-receiver), foolish, erring, confused persons without merit. (At this, it was objected:) 'They themselves do not know, so how will they explain (the Wheel-picture) to visiting brahmins and householders?'

The Lord said: 'A competent bhikkhu should be appointed'.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Later History of the Tradition**

Tibetan legend says that Lord Buddha outlined the Wheel with grains of rice while walking with bhikkhus in a rice field. However this may be, in India, at least in all the Sarvāstivāda monasteries, this painting will have adorned the interior of the gateways, arousing deep emotions in the hearts of those who knew its meaning, and curiosity in others. It is a measure of how great was the destruction of the Buddhist religion in India that not a single example survives anywhere, since no gateways to temples are known to have survived. A solitary painting in Ajanta cave number seventeen may perhaps be some form of this wheel.

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\* Translation by Ven. Bhikkhu Pāsādiko from the opening paragraphs of the *Sahasodgata Avadāna*, *Divyāvadāna* 21, Mithila Edition, page 185 ff.



In the translation above, the pictures for representing the twelve links of Dependent Arising were not given and it is said that these were supplied from the scriptures by Nāgārjuna, a great Buddhist Teacher (some of whose verses are quoted below). From India the pattern of this wheel was taken to Samye, the first Tibetan monastery, by Bande Yeshe and there it was the Sarvāstivāda lineage of ordination which was established. The tradition of painting this wheel thus passed to Tibet, where, due to climatic conditions, it was painted in the vestibule of the temple, there to strike the eyes of all who entered.

Tibetan tradition speaks of two kinds of Wheel: the old-style and the new-style. The old-style is based upon the text translated above, while the new-style introduces new features. The great reformer, Je Tsongkhapa (b. 1357 C.E.), founder of the Gelugpa (the Virtuous Ones, the school of which H. H. the Dalai Lama is the head), gave authority for the division of the Wheel into six instead of five, and for drawing the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the guise of a Buddha in each of the five non-human realms. Both these features may be seen upon the drawing of the Tibetan-style Wheel. The sixth realm is that of the titans (asura) who war against the gods of the sensual-sphere heavens. These troublesome and demonic characters are included in a separate part of the world of the gods in my drawing. The introduction of a Buddha-figure into each realm illustrates the universal quality of a Buddha's great compassion, for Avalokitesvara is the embodiment of enlightened compassion. The writer has preferred to retain the old-style representation according to the text as it agrees perfectly with Theravāda teachings.



The terrors and violence of saṃsāra, which are with us all the time, may be seen plainly in the ravishment of Tibet by the Chinese invaders. Tibetan artists have kept this tradition alive to the present day and still paint under difficulties as refugees in India. But this ancient way of presenting Dhamma deserves to be more widely known and appreciated. Buddhist shrines could well be equipped with representations of it in the present day, to remind devotees of the nature of this whirling wheel of birth and death.

## **The Symbolism and its Practical Meaning**

### **The Hub**

We now turn to the pictures of the *Bhava-cakka* accompanying this book. One is from a Tibetan original after Waddell. The second is a modern version executed by the author, in which the scenes and figures have been given a contemporary colouring.

The hub of this painting is the central point for us who live in the realm of saṃsāra, so it is the best point to start a description of the symbolism. In this centre circle, a cock, a snake and a hog wheel around, each having in its mouth the tail of the animal in front. These three, representing Greed, Aversion and Delusion which are the three roots of all evil, are depicted in the centre because they are the root causes for experience in the wandering on. When they are present in our hearts then we live afflicted in the transitory world of birth and death but when they are not there, having been destroyed by wisdom or paññā developed in Dhamma-practice, then we find rest, the unshakable peace of Nibbāna. It is notable that



Tibetan paintings show these creatures against a blue ground, showing that even these afflictions of mind, although powerful, have no real substance and are void, as are all the other elements of our experience.

The cock of fiery yellow-red represents greed (lobha). This greed includes every desire for all kinds of 'I wish, I want, I must have, I will have' and extends from the violent passion for gross physical form, through attachments to views and ideas, all the way to the subtle clinging to spiritual pleasures experienced by meditators. The colour of the cock, a fiery red, is symbolic of the fact that the passions burn those who indulge in them. Passions and desires are hot and restless, just like tongues of flame, and never allow the heart to experience the cool peace of non-attachment. The cock is chosen as a symbol of greed because as an animal it is observed to be full of lust and vanity.

In the cock's beak there is the tail of a green snake indicating that people who are not able to 'satisfy' their ocean-like greeds and lusts tend to become angry. Aversion (dosa) of any form springs up when we do not get what we want, or when we get what we do not want. This also can be very subtle, from aversion to mental states ranging through hostile thoughts against other beings, to expressions of inward resentment finding their way out in untruthful, malicious or angry words, or as physical violence. The greenness of the snake indicates the coldness, the lack of sympathy with others, while the snake itself is an animal killing other beings by poison or strangulation, which is exactly what aversion does to those who let it grow in their hearts. Our lives can be corrupted by this venomous beast unless we take very good care to remove it.



At the bottom of the picture there is a heavy hog, the tail of which is chewed by aversion's snake, while in turn it champs upon the tail feathers of greed's cock. This heavy hog is black in colour and represents delusion (moha). This black hog, like its brethren everywhere, likes to sleep for long, to root for food in filth and generally to take no care at all over cleanliness. It is a good symbol for delusion which prevents one from understanding what is advantageous and what is deleterious to oneself. Its heaviness is that sluggishness of mind and body which it induces in people, called variously stupidity, dullness, boredom, but worry and distraction with sceptical doubt also arise from this delusion-root. One who is overwhelmed by delusion does not know why he should restrain himself from evil, for he can see neither his own benefit with wisdom, nor the benefit of others by compassion—all is blanketed by delusion. He does not know, or does not believe that kamma (intentional actions) have results according to kind. Or he has wrong views which lead him astray from the highway of Dhamma. When people do not get what they want either using greed or aversion, then they turn dull and the pain of their desire is dulled by delusion. From this black hog are born the fiery cock and the cold green snake.

These three beasts, none more dangerous anywhere, are shown each biting the tail of the other, meaning that really they are inseparable, so that one cannot have, say, greed, without the other monsters lurking in its train. Even characters which are rooted predominantly in one of these three, have the other two present, while most people called 'normal' have a sort of unhealthy balance of these three in their hearts, ever ready to influence their actions when a suitable situation occurs. These three beasts



revolve endlessly in the heart of the ordinary-man (puthujjana) and ensure that he experiences plenty of dukkha. One should know for oneself whether these beasts control one's own heart, or not.

## **The First Ring**

Out from the innermost circle, the first ring is divided into two (not shown at all upon the Tibetan version illustrated here), one half with a white background and the other half having a black background. In the former, four people are seen ascending: the bhikkhu holding a Dhamma-light goes on in front, being followed by a white-robed nun (upāsikā), after which come a man and woman in present-day dress. The four of them represent the Buddhist Community made up of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. They are representative of anyone practising the path of good conduct in mind, speech and body. They represent as well two classes of persons: 'going from dark to light' and 'going from light to light'. In the first case, they are born in poor circumstances and have few opportunities due to past evil kamma but in spite of this, they make every effort to practise Dhamma for their own good and other's happiness. Thus they go towards the light, for the fruit of their present kamma will be pleasant and enjoyable. The latter class, 'going from light to light', are those people who have attained many benefits with plentiful opportunities in their present life, due to having done much good kamma in the past. In the present they continue with their upward course devoting themselves to further practice of Dhamma in their lives.

What is this Dhamma-practice? There are two lists both of ten factors which could be explained here but the



space required would be too great for more than a summary. The first list is called the ten Skilful Kamma-paths\*, three of which pertain to bodily action, four to speech and three to mental action. 'Paths' here means 'ways of action', and 'skilful' means 'neither for the deterioration of one's own mind nor for the harm of others'. The bodily actions which one refrains from are: destroying living creatures, taking what is not given, and wrong conduct in sexual desires. In speech, the four actions which should be avoided are: false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech and foolish chatter. The three actions of mind which should be avoided are: covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views. Anyone who restrains himself from these ten, practises a skilful path, a white path which accords with the first steps of training in Dhamma.

The other ten factors are called the Ten Ways of making Puñña\*\* (meaning actions purifying the heart). They have a different range from the first list of ten, being divided into three basic ways and seven secondary ones. The basic factors are giving (dāna), moral conduct (sīla) and mind development (bhāvanā), while the remaining seven are counted as aspects of these three: reverence, helpfulness, dedicating one's puñña to others, rejoicing in others' puñña, listening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma and straightening out one's views. These actions lead to uprightness, skilful conduct and to the growth in Dhamma of oneself, as well as the benefit of others.

Those who tread upon this white path going towards the light are able to be born in two bourns: either as men, or as 'shining-ones' — the gods in the three sorts of

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\* Dasa-kusala-kammapatha.

\*\* Dasa-puñña-kiriya-vatthu.



heavens, of sensuality, subtle form, and of formlessness. A life of good practice is thus usually followed by a life in one of these two bourns, called *sugati* or the good bourns. But Lord Buddha does not declare that *everyone* who has led such a life is necessarily born there. This depends not only upon the intensity of their Dhamma-practice but *also* upon the vision which arises at the time of death. Through negligence at the last moment, one can slip into the three evil bourns difficult to get out of. The round of Samsāra is very dangerous, even for those who lead almost blameless lives. More of this below. To be born in the two good bourns is the fruiting of puñña or skilful kamma and the more purified one's heart, the higher and more pleasant will be one's environment.

In the dark half of the ring, naked beings are tumbling downwards in disorder. Their nakedness symbolizes lack of shame in doing evil and their disorder shows the characteristic of evil to cause disintegration and confusion. 'Downwards' means that they are falling, by the commission of sub-human actions, to sub-human states of existence. In some Tibetan versions they are chained together and pulled downwards by a female demon who squats at the bottom. This demoness is craving or *taḥā* (a noun of female gender). This craving is, of course, not outside those who follow the path of evil but in their own hearts. On this path there are two sorts of persons, those 'going, from light to dark' and those 'going from dark to dark'. The former have good opportunities in this life but do not make use of them, or else use them for evil ends and thus waste the fruits of their previous good kamma without laying up any further store. Instead, they prefer from delusion to store up evil now for fear and distress in future. Those who go from dark to dark do



not have even the advantages of the former group for they are born in conditions of deprivation due to past evil kamma and then, driven on by the fruits of suffering received by them, they commit more evil.

The ten Unskilful Kamma-paths are the ways along which they walk:— destroying living creatures, taking what is not given, wrong conduct in sexual desires; false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech, foolish chatter; covetousness, ill-will and wrong-views. They do not delight in making puñña but are by nature, mean, immoral, undeveloped in mind, proud, selfish, grasp at possessions, envious, never listen to Dhamma and certainly never teach it, while their hearts are ridden with confused and contradictory views and ideas.

For their pains, having pursued evil, these beings upon their death, already having destroyed ‘humanness’ in themselves, fall down to the three lower states which are called the Evil Bourns (duggati). These are, in order of deterioration and increase of sufferings; the hungry ghosts, the animals, and the hell-wraiths. Truly a case of:

“do good, good fruit

do bad, bad fruit” — as the Thai proverb says. These two half-circles are also an illustration of the refrain which closes every one of the Avadāna stories : “Thus, bhikkhus, completely black kamma bears completely evil effects; completely white kamma bears completely good effects; and composite kamma, composite effects. Therefore, bhikkhus, abstain from doing completely black kamma and composite kamma; strive to do kamma completely white. Thus, O bhikkhus, must you train yourselves”.



## The Five Divisions

The two good bourns and the three evil bourns contain the whole range of possibilities for rebirth. In most Tibetan illustrations, including the one shown here, a sixth bourn is given, by dividing the devas and asuras (the gods and anti-gods or titans). In this section the five, or six bourns will be described, together with the ways to get to them. Birth in any bourn is a fruit or effect and here we shall see the causes.

A person who has done evil persistently, or even one heavy crime, is likely to see at the time of death a vision, either relating to his past evil actions, or else to the bourn which his past evil actions or kamma have prepared for him. When his physical body is no longer a suitable basis to support life, his mind creates a body ghostly and subtle in substance, which then and there begins to experience one of the evil bourns. But in case his kamma drives him to be born as animal, there is the vision of animals copulating and he is dragged into the womb or egg of those animals.

Kamma which leads to birth as an animal is a strong interest in the things which mankind shares with the animals, that is, eating, drinking and sex. If a man strengthens the animal in himself, to become an 'animal-man', he can expect only to be born as an animal. Human beings interested in only these things, strengthening the Evil Root of Delusion in their minds, have already the minds of animals. There is no essential 'man-ness' which can prevent such a catastrophe, for no unchanging human soul exists. If a man wishes to guard himself against this, he must protect the conditions for humanity (manussa-dhamma) which are the Five Precepts. Sinking



below the level of conduct of these precepts, is to sink into the sub-human levels. Once rebirth as an animal has taken place it is by no means easy to gain human birth again, as Venerable Nāgārjuna has written :

“ More difficult is it to rise  
from birth as animal to man,  
Than for the turtle blind to see  
the yoke upon the ocean drift;  
Therefore, do you being a man  
practise Dhamma and gain its fruits.”  
(L.K. 59).\*

Kamma dragging one to the hells, which are the most fearful and miserable states, are actions involving hatred, killing, torture and violence generally. People lead themselves to experience hell because they have made the Evil Root of Aversion very strong within themselves.

On the other hand, those who have strengthened the Evil Root of Greed while they were men, having been mean, possessive and selfish, are liable to arise as spirits with strong cravings for ever unsatisfied, for which reason they are known as ‘hungry’ ghosts.

However, it does sometimes happen that one who has led an evil life turns sincerely to religion upon his deathbed. When this occurs, with his mind centred upon Dhamma and purified by faith, a person like this may be reborn among men, or even arise among the devas. That evil kamma which has been done though it may have no chance to fructify in those good bourns,

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\* “The Letter of Kindheartedness” by Ācariya Nāgārjuna, in “Wisdom Gone Beyond”, Social Service Association Press of Thailand, Phya Thai Road, Bangkok, Siam.



remains a potential for creating very unpleasant results whenever conditions are favourable to its fruition. The reverse of this may happen, as when good and noble men become distracted at death and so remember some small evil done, or see a vision of evil done in some past life, the result of which is the arising of unwholesome consciousness leading to the evil bourns.

It is more usual for one who has followed the path of white deeds to be born as a man or among the gods. The basis for the former is the practice of the Five Precepts which constitute the level of humanness. They are in brief: refraining from destroying living creatures; refraining from taking what is not given; refraining from wrong conduct in sexual desires; refraining from false speech, and refraining from distilled and fermented intoxicants which cause carelessness. Those who refrain from such things, having really lived as men, having strengthened the base of humanness in their own hearts, are born again as men well-endowed with the riches of fine qualities; of varied opportunities, as well as with a wealth of worldly goods.

The path to the heavens is cultivated by those who make special efforts to live with purity and self-restraint, exercising loving-kindness towards all beings and so purifying their minds to some extent through meditation. At the time of death, having fulfilled the ten Skilful Kamma paths and the ten Ways of Making Puñña, the heart will be joyful and peaceful to varying degrees, which will result in the experience of arising in one of the many heavenly levels according to the degree of purity and concentration which had been attained.

All these possibilities are within the scope of the mind the quality of which can be changed in this way or



that by kamma, good or bad. From the type of mind which performs the duty of relinking-consciousness at birth, is determined the kind of sense-organs possessed by a being, and hence the kind of world experienced by him. Perception varies—as the famous Buddhist verses put it :

“As a water-vessel is  
variously perceived by beings :  
Nectar to celestials,  
is for a man plain drinking-water,  
While to the hungry ghost it seems  
a putrid ooze of pus and blood,  
Is for the water serpent-spirits  
and the fish, a place to live in,  
While it is space to gods who dwell  
in the sphere of infinite space.  
So any object, live or dead,  
within the person or without —  
Differently is seen by beings  
according to their fruits of kamma.”

From such verses we catch a glimpse of the mysterious depths of the mind, and of the truth of the Exalted Buddha's words which open the Dhammapada:

“Before all dhammas goes the mind;  
Mind is the chief, mind-made are they. . . ”

To come now to a description of the picture. In the world of *the gods* or ‘shining-ones’ (deva, upper right, but topmost in the Tibetan version), the gilded palaces and glittering jewel trees of the gods of sensuality are shown in the lower part of the drawing. The Tibetan picture shows more details of these superlatively



beautiful worlds in which there is also a kind of subtle sexual relationship. Being based upon sensuality, as this world of men is, these devas must also pay the price for this—which is conflict. This conflict is an ever-recurring battle with the asuras, the anti-gods or titans who have in past times fallen through their quarrelsome nature from the heavens and who now enviously try to invade the celestial realms. In my picture, they share a segment of the world of gods and they are equipped with ancient and modern weapons and are in the dress of soldiers. But they do not only battle with the gods but also among themselves and so a bit of insubordination is depicted as well. The Tibetan picture gives them a world to themselves along the frontiers of which they are fleeing from the victorious heavenly hosts led upon a very large elephant by Sakka, the lord of the sensual-realm gods. These titans only understand force, so the Buddha shown in their world bears a sword with which to duly impress them, after which they may be able to hear a little Dhamma. By contrast, the Buddha appearing among the gods bears a lute, in order to lure them into listening to Dhamma sung in exquisite strains, for it was believed that they would not be interested in mere spoken words!

Above the battling of the sensual-realm gods dwell the Brahmas of subtle form and of formlessness, experiencing meditative happiness, serene joy, or sublime equanimity. The Tibetan picture also shows a magnificent Brahma world palace in the upper lefthand corner. About all this heavenly splendour, Ven. Nāgarjuna warns us :—

“ Great King, although celestial worlds  
have pleasures great to be enjoyed,  
Greater the pain of dying there.



From often contemplating this  
a noble person does not wish  
For transient heavenly joys." (L K. 98).

He goes on to speak of the devas as those

"Who, dying from celestial realms  
with no remaining merit fruits  
Must take up their abode  
according to the karma past,—  
With birth as beast or hungry ghost,  
or else arise in hell." (L K. 101).

The Brahmas of formlessness dwelling for unthink-able ages in the realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness, no-thingness, and neither-perception-nor-non-perception being quite without any form, naturally cannot be shown, but even their states are not eternal, but come to an end.

*Among men* (upper left in both pictures), the progress of the human-being is shown: birth (a perambulator; old-age, sickness (hospital sign) and death (a bloated corpse in a graveyard), but with this basis of dukkha, men can also understand Dhamma. Lord Buddha, foremost among men, sits highest in the human world teaching Dhamma in a forest grove to his first five disciples. In the original version which my picture follows, He is shown only in the human world thus emphasizing the value of human birth, during which it is possible to gain insight into Dhamma. The religious aspirations of man are represented by a Hindu temple, a Christian church and Muslim mosque, while a war and a bar show his tendencies towards aversion and greed. The Tibetan picture shows several mundane activities such as ploughing the fields, while people climb towards the top of the picture where there



is a temple in which they can listen to Dhamma. In the centre stands a Buddha carrying the almsbowl and staff, showing to men the way of peacefulness leading to the Sublime Peace of Nibbāna. This is shown in my picture by the sure Dhamma-path which issues from the mouth of the Exalted Buddha. Upon this way a bhikkhu lends a hand to help householders out of the realms of samsāra, leading them forward upon the Eightfold Path. Venerable Nāgarjuna has this to say :—

“ Who though he has been born a man  
yet gives himself to evil ways,  
More foolish is he than the fool  
who fills with vomit, urine, dung  
Golden vessels jewel-adorned—  
harder man's birth to gain than these.  
(L. K. 60).

*Hungry ghosts* or peta (lower right in my picture, lower left in the Tibetan) crave for food and drink but find that it turns to fire or foul things when they are able to get it. I have shown a huge moon and a tiny sun, as the verse says :—

“ From want of merit, hungry ghosts  
in summer find the moon is hot,  
in winter, sun is cold;  
Barren are the trees they see  
and mighty rivers running on  
dry up whene'er they look at them.”  
(L.K. 95).

Then there is a sky-going peta being torn to shreds by birds, as seen by Venerable Moggallāna; one ‘resting’ upon rocks under a leafless tree which is the simile used by the Exalted Buddha in the suttas to symbolize the sole



comforts of this realm, and two ghosts sunk in the water up to their lower lips, their gaping mouths just a little too high to get any of it. The state of Tantalus was obviously birth among the hungry ghosts! The ghosts all have bloated bellies, extremely slender necks and 'needle-mouths'. Their sufferings are illustrated further in the Tibetan. They have to bear the intense cravings for food and drink and then more sufferings when they manage to get a little of it, for it turns to swords and knives in their bellies. The Buddha in this "abundantly painful" realm carries celestial food to allay the ghosts' cravings. In the words of Ven. Nāgarjuna :—

“ Lord Buddha has declared the cause  
    why beings come to birth as ghosts,  
    torments to endure  
For when as men they gave no gifts,  
    or giving gave with avarice—  
They ghostly kamma made. (L.K. 97).

*The animals*, in the Tibetan illustration, are being encouraged in the Dhamma by a Buddha holding a book, illustrating the point that animals have little ability to understand and are in need of wisdom. My picture illustrates the sufferings of animal-life as described by Ven. Nāgarjuna :—

“ Then should you come to birth as beast  
    many are the pains —  
Killing, disease and gory strife  
    binding, striking too.  
Void of peaceful, skilful acts  
    beasts slay and kill without remorse.  
Some among beasts are slain because  
    they produce pearls, or wool, or bones,  
    or valued are for meat or hide.



Others are pressed to do men's work  
by blows or sticks or iron hook,  
by whipping them to work. (L.K. 89-90).

In the animal-world where feelings experienced are "painful, sharp and severe", one can see the dukkha, the hunter and the hunted, in my illustration. The birds of the air are being shot while a vulture is feeding on its prey. A wasp struggling in the net of a spider represents the horrors of life among the insects, while among the larger animals, a buffalo is being forced to work, a deer is being shot and a lion feeds upon its prey. The fish fare no better and are shown being devoured by larger fish, or else hooked and netted by men. Slithering down the division of this world from the hells, there is a gecko. The Tibetan picture illustrates the diversity of animal life and shows, under the waters, the palace of the serpent-spirits or nāga, half snake and half man.

The *hells*, which are not permanent states of course, have some new horrors of our day: for railway lines run into a concentration camp from the chimneys of which belches sinister black smoke, while a uniformed member of some secret police force compels a suppliant bell-wraith to swallow molten metal. Towards the viewer flows the river of caustic soda called Vaitarani which burns the flesh off the bones of those swirling along in it, mingled with a stream of blood from the clashing mountains. Whatever torments hell wraiths experience, though their bodies are mangled, crushed and ripped apart, yet they survive still for vast ages of time experiencing feelings which are "exclusively painful, sharp and severe", unrelenting and uninterrupted:—



“ As highest is the bliss that comes  
from all desires’ cessation —  
No higher bliss than this !  
So worst the woe that’s known in hell  
Āvīci with no interval —

No woe is worse than this ! (L.K. 85)

In the foreground is the hell of filth where hell-wraiths, who as men had corrupted the innocent, are devoured by gigantic maggots while floundering in a stinking ooze. To the left are the trees of the sword-blade forest which have to be climbed so that hell wraiths are pierced through and through. This particular aspect of hell is said to be the punishment which adulterers bring on themselves. Various murderers and torturers are impaled upon stakes while a steel-beaked bird rips out the entrails of former cock-fighters. Venerable Nāgarjuna has some more verses upon these lowest and most-miserable states :—

“ The criminal who has to bear  
throughout a single day  
The piercing of three hundred spears  
as punishment for crime,  
His pain can nowise be compared  
to the least pain found in hell.

The pains of hell may still persist  
a hundred crores of years—  
Without respite, unbearable  
So long the fruits of evil acts  
do not exhaust the force—

So long continues life in hell.” (L.K. 86-87).

Jetsun Milarepa, the great sage and poet of Tibet, who had seen the heavens and hells and other states, once sung this verse :—



“ Fiends filled with cravings for pleasures  
Murder even their parents and teachers,  
Rob the Three Gems of their treasures,  
Revile and falsely accuse the Precious Ones,  
And condemn the Dhamma as untrue:  
In the hell of unceasing torment  
These evil-doers will be burned . . . . .”\*

Those who now violate the peoples of Tibet and their Dhamma might well take note! This brief survey of the Five Bourns (*pañcagati*) may be concluded with a verse of exhortation from “The Letter of Kindheartedness”:—

“ If your head or dress caught fire  
in haste you would extinguish it,  
Do likewise with desire—  
which whirls the wheel of wandering-on  
And is the root of suffering,  
No better thing to do! (L. K. 104).

## **The Rim of the Wheel (Dependent Arising)**

### *The Twelve-linked Chain*

Our description has now come to the Rim, or felly of the Wheel, which depicts the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. It is these links which chain the entire universe of beings to re-becoming and to suffering.

It is a well-established tradition to explain this chain as referring to three lives (past, present and future). While the present is the only time which is real, it has been moulded in the past. It is in the present that we produce kamma of mind, speech and body, to bear fruit in the future. In the twelve *nidānas* or ‘links’

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\* See “Sixty Songs of Milarepa”, Wheel, No. 95/97



around this wheel are set out the whole pattern of life and in it all questions relating to existence are answered. The teaching of Dependent Arising, central in our Dhamma-Vinaya, is not, however, for speculation but should be investigated and seen in one's own and others' lives, and finally it may be perceived in one's own heart where all the Truths of Dhamma become clear after practice. But people who do not practise Dhamma are called 'upholders of the world'; they let this wheel whirl them round from unknowing to old-age and death. The Exalted Buddha urged us not to be 'world upholders' but through Dhamma-practice to relinquish greed, aversion and delusion so that by the cessation of unknowing there comes to be a cessation of birth, old-age and death.

Now let us have a look at these twelve links in brief.

*First Link; Unknowing ( avijjā ).*

This Pāli word 'avijjā' is a negative term meaning 'not knowing completely' but it does not mean 'knowing nothing at all'. This kind of unknowing is very special and not concerned with ordinary ways or subjects of knowledge, for here what one does not know are the Four Noble Truths, one does not see them clearly in one's own heart and one's own life. In past lives, we did not care to see *dukkha* (1), so we could not destroy *the cause of dukkha* (2) or craving which has impelled us to seek more and more lives, more and more pleasures. *The cessation of dukkha* (3) which perhaps could have been seen by us in past lives, was not realized, so we come to the present existence inevitably burdened with dukkha. And in the past we can hardly assume that we set our feet upon the *practice-path leading to the*



*cessation of dukkha* (4) and we did not even discover Stream-entry. We are now paying for our own negligence in the past.

And this unknowing is not some kind of first cause in the past for it dwells in our hearts now. But due to this unknowing, as we shall see, we have set in motion this wheel bringing round old age and death and all other sorts of *dukkha*. Those past 'selves' in previous lives who are in the stream of my individual continuity did not check their craving and so could not cut at the root of unknowing. On the contrary they made *kamma*, some of the fruits of which in this present life I, as their causal resultant, am receiving.

The picture helps us to understand this, a blind old woman (*avijjā* is of feminine gender) with a stick picks her way through a petrified forest strewn with bones. It is said that the original picture here should be an old blind she-camel led by a driver, the beast being one accustomed to long and weary journeys across inhospitable country, while its driver could be craving. Which-ever simile is used, the beginninglessness and the darkness of unknowing are well suggested. We are the blind ones who have staggered from the past into the present — to what sort of future?

Depending on the existence of unknowing in the heart there was volitional action, *kamma* or *abhisankhāra*, made in those past lives.

*Second Link: Volitions (sankhāra).*

Intentional actions have the latent power within them to bear fruit in the future — either in a later part of the life in which they were performed, in the following



life, or in some more distant life, but their potency is not lost with even the passing of aeons; and whenever the necessary conditions obtain that past kamma may bear fruit. Now, in past lives we have made kamma, and due to our ignorance of the Four Noble Truths we have been 'world-upholders' and so making good and evil kamma we have ensured the continued experience of this world.\*

Beings like this, obstructed by unknowing in their hearts have been compared to a potter making pots: he makes successful and beautiful pottery (skilful kamma) and he is sometimes careless and his pots crack and break up from various flaws (unskilful kamma). And he gets his clay fairly well smeared over himself just as purity of heart is obscured by the mud of kamma. The simile of the potter is particularly apt because the word *Sankhāra* means 'forming,' 'shaping,' and 'compounding', and therefore it has often been rendered in English as 'Formations.'

Depending on the existence of these volitions produced in past lives, there arises the consciousness called 'relinking' which becomes the basis of this present life.

### *Third Link: Consciousness ( viññāṇa ).*

This relinking consciousness may be of different qualities, according to the kamma upon which it depends. In the case of all those who read this, the consciousness 'leaping' into a new birth at the time of conception, was a human relinking consciousness arising as a result of having practised at least the Five Precepts, the basis of

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\* Imperturbable volitions are made only in the Formless worlds.



‘humanness’ in past lives. One should note that this relinking consciousness is a resultant, not something which can be controlled by will. If one has not made kamma suitable for becoming a human-being, one cannot will, when the time of death comes round, ‘Now I shall become a man again!’ The time for intentional action was when one had the opportunity to practise Dhamma. Although our relinking-consciousness in this birth is now behind us, it is now that we can practise Dhamma and make more sure of a favourable relinking consciousness in future, — that is, if we wish to go on living in Samsāra.

This relinking-consciousness is the third constituent necessary for conception, for even though it is the mother’s period and sperm is deposited in the womb, if there is no ‘being’ desiring to take rebirth at that place and time there will be no fertilization of the ovum.

Appropriately, the picture shows a monkey, the consciousness, leaping from one tree, the old life, to another tree. The old tree has died while the one towards which it jumps is laden with fruits—they may be the fruits of good or of evil. The Tibetan picture shows a monkey devouring fruit, experiencing the fruits of deeds done in the past.

Dependent upon relinking-consciousness there is the arising of mind-body.

*Fourth Link: Mind-body ( nāma-rūpa ).*

This is not a very accurate translation but gives the general meaning. There is more included in rūpa than is usually thought of as body, while mind is a



compound of feeling, perception, volition and consciousness. This mind and body is two interacting continuities in which there is nothing stable. Although in conventional speech we talk of 'my mind' and 'my body' implying that there is some sort of owner lurking in the background, the wise understand that laws govern the workings of both mental states and physical changes and mind cannot be ordered to be free of defilements, nor body told that it must not grow old, become sick and die.

But it is in the mind that a change can be wrought instead of drifting through life at the mercy of the inherent instability of mind and body. So in the illustration, mind is doing the work of punting the boat of psycho-physical states on the river of cravings, while body is the passive passenger. The Tibetan picture shows a coracle being rowed over swirling waters with three ( ? or four) other passengers, who doubtless represent the other groups or aggregates (khandha).

With the coming into existence of mind-body, there is the arising of the six sense-spheres.

#### *Fifth Link: Six sense-spheres ( saḷāyatana )*

A house with six windows is the usual symbol for this link (but the Tibetan shows a house with one (?) window). These six senses are eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind, and these are the bases for the reception of the various sorts of information which each can gather in the presence of the correct conditions. This information falls under six headings corresponding to the six spheres: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and thoughts. Beyond these six spheres of sense and their corresponding six objective spheres, we



know nothing. All our experience is limited by the senses and their objects with the mind counted as the sixth. The five outer senses collect data only in the present but mind, the sixth, where this information is collected and processed, ranges through the three times adding memories from the past and hopes and fears for the future, as well as thoughts of various kinds relating to the present. It may also add information about the spheres of existence which are beyond the range of the five outer senses, such as the various heavens, the ghosts and the hell-states. A mind developed through collectedness (*samādhi*) is able to perceive these worlds and their inhabitants.

The six sense-spheres existing, there is contact.

#### *Sixth Link: Contact ( phassa )*

This means the contact between the six senses and their respective objects. For instance, when the necessary conditions are all fulfilled, there being an eye, a sight-object, light and the eye being functional and the person awake and turned towards the object, there is likely to be eye-contact, the striking of the object upon the sensitive eye-base. The same is true for each of the senses and their types of contact. The traditional symbol for this link shows a man and woman embracing.

Where contact arises, feeling exists.

#### *Seventh Link: Feeling ( vedanā )*

When there have been various sorts of contact through the six senses, feelings arise which are the emotional response to those contacts. Feelings are of three sorts : pleasant, painful and neither pleasant nor painful. The



first are welcome and are the basis for happiness, the second are unwelcome and the basis for dukkha while the third are the neutral sort of feelings which we experience so often but hardly notice.

But all feelings are unstable and liable to change, for no mental state can continue in equilibrium. Even moments of the highest happiness whatever we consider this is, pass away and give place to different ones. So even happiness which is impermanent based on pleasant feelings is really dukkha, for how can the true unchanging happiness be found in the unstable? Thus the picture shows a man with his eyes pierced by arrows, a strong enough illustration of this.

When feelings arise, cravings are (usually) produced.

#### *Eighth Link: Craving ( taṇhā )*

Up to this point, the succession of events has been determined by past kamma. Craving, however, leads to the making of new kamma in the present and it is possible now, and only now, to practise Dhamma. What is needed here is mindfulness (sati) for without it no Dhamma at all can be practised while one will be swept away by the force of past habits and let craving and unknowing increase themselves within one's heart. When one does have mindfulness one may and can know 'this is pleasant feeling', 'this is unpleasant feeling', 'this is neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling' — and such contemplation of feelings leads one to understand and beware of greed, aversion and delusion which are respectively associated with the three feelings. With this knowledge one can break out of the Wheel of Birth and Death But without this Dhamma-practice it is certain



that feelings will lead on to more cravings and whirl one around this wheel full of dukkha. As Venerable Nāgarjuna has said :

“ Desires have only surface sweetness,  
hardness within and bitterness —  
deceptive as the kimpa-fruit.

Thus says the King of Conquerors.

Such links renounce—they bind the world  
Within saṃsāra's prison grid.

If your head or dress caught fire  
in haste you would extinguish it,

Do likewise with desire —

Which whirls the wheel of wandering-on  
and is the root of suffering.

No better thing to do !

(L.K. 23, 104).

In Sanskrit, the word *trīṣṇā* (*taṇhā*) means thirst, and by extension implies ‘thirst for experience’. For this reason, craving is shown as a toper guzzling intoxicants and in my picture I have added three bottles—craving for sensual sphere existence and the craving for the higher heavens of the Brahma-worlds which are either of subtle form, or formless.

Where the kamma of further craving is produced there arises Grasping.

### *Ninth Link: Grasping (upādāna)*

This is an intensification and diversification of craving which is directed to four ends : sensual pleasures, views which lead astray from Dhamma, external religious rites and vows, and attachment to the view of soul or self as being permanent. When these become strong in people they cannot even become interested in Dhamma,



for their efforts are directed away from Dhamma and towards dukkha. The common reaction is to redouble efforts to find peace and happiness among the objects which are grasped at. Hence both pictures show a man reaching up to pick more fruit although his basket is full already.

Where this grasping is found, there Becoming is to be seen.

### *Tenth Link : Becoming ( bhava )*

With hearts boiling with craving and grasping, people ensure for themselves more and more of various sorts of life, and pile up the fuel upon the fire of dukkha. The ordinary person, not knowing about dukkha, wants to stoke up the blaze, but the Buddhist way of doing things is to let the fires go out for want of fuel by stopping the process of craving and grasping and thus cutting off Unknowing at its root. If we want to stay in samsāra we must be diligent and see that our *becoming*, which is happening all the time shaped by our kamma, is *becoming* in the right direction. This means *becoming* in the direction of purity and following the white path of Dhamma-practice. This will contribute to whatever we become, or do not become, at the end of this life when the pathways to the various realms stand open and we *become* according to our practice and to our death-consciousness.

Appropriately, *Becoming* is illustrated by a pregnant woman.

In the presence of Becoming there is arising in a new birth.



### *Eleventh Link : Birth ( jāti )*

Birth, as one might expect, is shown as a mother in the process of childbirth, a painful business and a reminder of how *dukkha* cannot be avoided in any life. Whatever the future life is to be, if we are not able to bring the wheel to a stop in this life, certainly that future will arise conditioned by the *kamma* made in this life. But it is no use thinking that since there are going to be future births, one may as well put off Dhamma practice until then—for it is not sure what those future births will be like. And when they come around, they are just the present moment as well. So no use waiting! Venerable Nāgarjuna shows that it is better to extricate oneself :

“ Where birth takes place, quite naturally  
are fear, old age and misery,  
disease, desire and death,  
As well a mass of other ills.  
When birth's no longer brought about  
All the links are ever stopped.”  
(L K. 111).

Naturally where there is Birth, is also Old-age and Death.

### *Twelfth Link : Old-age and Death ( jarā-maraṇa ),*

In future one is assured, given enough of Unknowing and Craving, of lives without end but also of deaths without end. The one appeals to greed but the other arouses aversion. One without the other is impossible. But this is the path of heedlessness. The Dhamma-path leads directly to Deathlessness, the going beyond birth and death, beyond all *dukkha*.

The Tibetan picture shows an old man carrying off a bundled-up corpse upon his back, taking it away



to some charnel-field. My picture has an old man gazing at a coffin enclosing a corpse. We are well exhorted by the words of Acarya Nāgarjuna :

“ Do you therefore exert yourself :  
At all times try to penetrate  
into the heart of these Four Truths;  
For even those who dwell at home,  
they will, by understanding them  
ford the river of (mental) floods.”

(L. K. 115).

This is a very brief outline of the workings of this wheel which we cling to for our own harm and the hurt of others. We are the makers of this wheel and the turners of this wheel, but if we wish it and work for it, we are the ones who can stop this wheel.

### *The Monster*

Both pictures show the Wheel as being in the grip of a fearful monster. In my drawing the monster's name is engraved upon his crown so that people should not think of him as a common demon. He is no such thing, for his name is Impermanence and his crown shows his authority over all worlds whatever. He devours them and they are all, heavens and hells together, securely held in the grasp of his taloned hands. The crown upon his head is adorned with five skulls, representing the impermanence of the five groups or aggregates comprising the person. His eyes, ears, nose and mouth have flames about them, an illustration of the Exalted Buddha's Third Discourse in which He says: “The eye is a fire . . . . .” and so on. Above the monster's two eyes, there is a third one meaning that



while for the fool impermanence is his enemy, for the wise man it helps him to Enlightenment. Although the monster has adorned himself with earrings and the like he fails to look attractive—in the same way, this world puts on an outer show of beauty but its beauty fades when examined more carefully.

Below the painting of the wheel, some Tibetan examples show parts of a tiger-skin adorning the monster, a symbol of fearfulness. In my drawing I show the monster's tail which has no beginning, looping back and forth. In the same way, we have been born, lived and then died countless times in the whirl of samsāra. Sometimes our deeds were mostly good and sometimes mostly bad, and we have reaped the fruit of it all.

#### *Some other features.*

The whole wheel glows with heat and is surrounded by flames burning with the fires of greed, aversion and delusion as the Exalted One has repeated many times in His Discourses.

In the upper right corner of both pictures stands the Exalted Buddha shown crossed over to the Further Shore, meaning Nibbāna. The Tibetan picture shows him pointing out the moon upon which is drawn a hare, the symbol of renunciation, the way to practise Dhamma, and the way out of this wheel.\* In my picture, He indicates with his hand the nature of samsāra and warns us to beware. He is adorned with a radiance about Him symbolizing the spiritual freedom and majestic wisdom won by Him which can be described in many ways but is finally beyond the limitations of everything known to us.

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\* Not included in the reproduction given here.



The Tibetan picture shows in the upper left, a drawing of Avalokitesvara,\* the embodiment of compassion as the way and the goal for those who follow the bodhisattva-path. My picture has the Path of Dhamma of eight lotuses leading to the Wheel of Dhamma. The eight lotuses are the eight factors of the Noble Path, the first two—Right View, Right Attitude—being the wisdom-section; the next three—Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood—being the morality-section; and the last three—Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness—being the section of collectedness or meditation. The Wheel of Dhamma has at its centre *suññatā*, the Void, another name for the experience of *Nibbāna*. Around its hub are the ten petals of a lotus, representing the ten perfecting qualities (*pārami*) which are necessary for complete attainment: generosity, moral conduct, renunciation, wisdom, determination, energy, patience, truthfulness, loving-kindness and equanimity. Eight spokes radiate from the hub which stand for the practice by the Arahant, the one perfected, of the Eightfold Path when each factor, instead of being just right, becomes perfect. On the inside of the wheel's nave there are 37 jewels symbolizing the thirty-seven factors of Enlightenment, while the outer edge of the nave is adorned with four groups of three jewels showing the Four Noble Truths in each of the three ways wherein they were viewed by the Exalted Buddha when He discovered Enlightenment.\*

### *Conclusion*

This picture teaches us and reminds us of many important features of the Dhamma as it was intended to be by the teachers of old. Contemplating all its features

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\* Not included in the reproduction given here.

• See The Wheel No. 17: 'Three Cardinal Discourses', p. 7 f.



frequently helps to give us true insight into the nature of Saṃsāra. With its help and our own practice we come to see Dependent Arising in ourselves. When this has been done thoroughly all the riches of Dhamma will be available to us, not from books or discussions, nor from listening to others' explanations . . . . .

The Exalted Buddha has said :

“Whoever sees Dependent Arising, he sees Dhamma;  
Whoever sees Dhamma, he sees Dependent Arising.”



*Rewritten from an article in “Visākha Pūjā” (2511),  
the Annual of the Buddhist Association of Thailand.*



Aniccā vata sankhārā  
uppāda vayadhammino  
Uppajjitvā nirōjjhanti  
tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho.

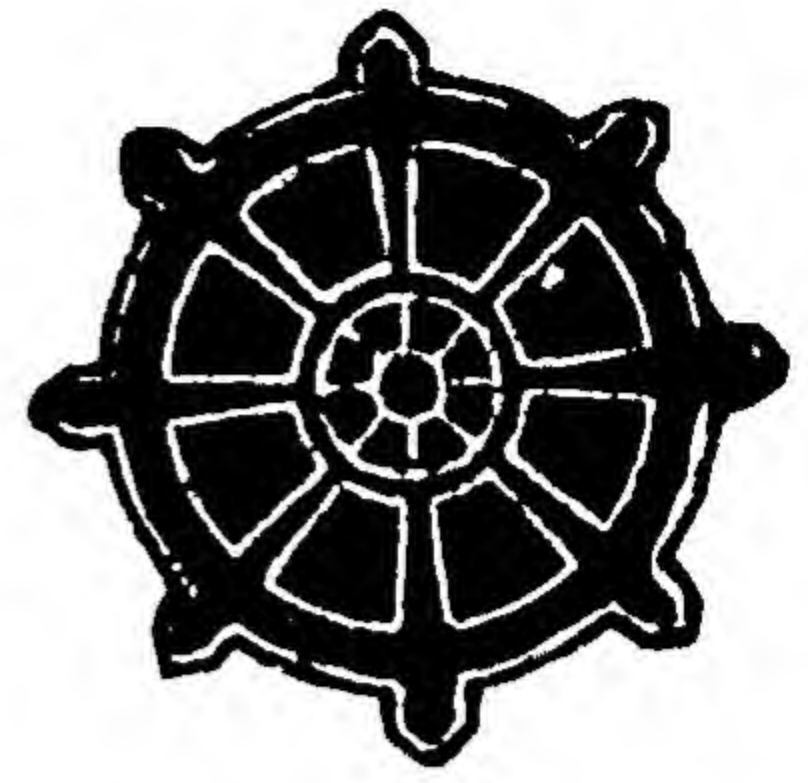
Conditions truly they are transient  
With the nature to arise and cease  
Having arisen, then they pass away,  
Their calming, cessation is happiness.





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**K. N. JAYATILLEKE**

M. A. (Cantab.), Ph. D. (London)

Professor of Philosophy

University of Ceylon

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# I

## THE BUDDHIST VIEW OF SURVIVAL

In this talk I propose to state and examine the Buddhist view of survival. At the same time I wish to stress the fact that apart from briefly examining the intelligibility of the theory I do not propose to consider here its truth (or falsity) in the light of modern evidence, which I shall do in a later talk.

It is necessary to have a clear and authentic formulation of the Buddhist conception of survival as found in the early texts since there seem to be some misconceptions about this. We may briefly state some of these misconceptions.

### Misconceptions

According to one view the Buddha lived in a society in which the doctrine of rebirth was universally (or widely) taken for granted from time immemorial. The Buddha himself saw no reason to question this belief which he accepted uncritically and dogmatically.

Another such misconception may be stated as follows. The Buddha's doctrine of *anattā* or no-soul was a denial of the existence of an animistic soul which survived the death of the body and transmigrated. Since nothing survived the death of the body, Buddhism is a form of materialism. The Buddha utilised the doctrines of rebirth and karma prevailing in his society (so they say) to impart ethical teachings but did not himself believe in these doctrines.



There is yet another misconception. According to this view, the Buddha was not interested or held no specific views about the question of human survival or life after death. He roundly condemned speculation about the past or the future (i. e. about prior lives or future lives) as unprofitable or mistaken. He was only concerned with man's present state of anxiety, suffering and dissatisfaction and the solution for it.

These misconceptions can be cleared only by making a careful study of the authentic early texts of Buddhism. When we do so we find that the Buddha did assert (i) the continuity without identity of individuality due to the operation of causal factors, (ii) the doctrine of anattā, which denied the existence of a physical, mental, psychophysical or independent entity within or related to the psycho-physical aspects of personality and (iii) that he rejected mere metaphysical speculation about prior or future lives which did not result in the verification of facts about them.

### **Historical Background**

In order to understand the Buddhist view of survival it is desirable to have some knowledge of the views presented by pre-Buddhist thinkers prior to the rise of Buddhism since the Buddhist conceptions were often presented in contrast to them.

It is a remarkable fact that in no other age in the history of thought was a solution to the problem of survival sought with such intensity as in this period and nowhere else can we find such a variety of views put forward.



Logically there are four possible points of view that we can adopt with regard to the question of survival. We may say (i) that we survive death in the form of discarnate spirits, i. e. a single after-life theory, (ii) that we are annihilated with death, i. e. a materialist theory, (iii) that we are unable to discover a satisfactory answer to this question or there is no satisfactory answer, i. e. a sceptical or positivist theory and (iv) that we come back to subsequent earth-lives or lives on other similar planets, i. e. a rebirth theory.

The Buddhist texts record several variants of each of these four types of theories. Let us take the variants of single after-life theories or one-life-after-death theories.

### Single After-life Theories

There are thirty two of them listed in the Brahma-jāla Sutta. According to what philosophers or religious teachers, who put these theories forward, assert, they are broadly classified into theories which posit that the soul after death is (A) conscious (saññī), (B) unconscious (asaññī) and (G) superconscious (nevasaññīnāsaññī).

There are sixteen variants of (A) and eight each of (B) and (C). The sixteen variants of (A) are due to

I. Variations regarding the *material form* of the soul :

- (i) has a subtle material form
- (ii) has no such form
- (iii) has for some time a subtle material form and then has no such form
- (iv) has no such form but has the power of manifesting one.



II. Variations regarding the *duration* of the soul:

- (i) comes to an end
- (ii) is eternal
- (iii) changes its state after some time and becomes eternal
- (iv) does not exist in time.

III. Variations regarding the *nature and extent* of consciousness:

- (i) is conscious of unity
- (ii) is conscious of diversity
- (iii) is of limited consciousness
- (iv) is of unlimited consciousness.

IV. Variations regarding the *hedonic tone* of the experiences:

- (i) is extremely happy
- (ii) is extremely unhappy
- (iii) is partly happy and partly unhappy
- (iv) does not experience happiness or unhappiness, i.e. has a neutral hedonic tone.

Only variations I (i) - (iv) and II (i)-(iv) are considered applicable to those who hold that the soul was (B) unconscious or (C) superconscious after death.

The above classification appears to be a purely logical one but the fact that many of these theories can be traced to pre-Buddhistic literature, proves that it is not.

Thus Prajāpati held on the basis of rational and metaphysical speculation that the soul was 'conscious



and having its own form after death' (Chāndogya Upanisad, 8.12)—i.e. A I (i). Uddālaka held that the soul was 'unconscious and without form' after death—i.e. B I (ii). The Taitirīya Upanisad holds that the soul has a subtle material form for some time after death and then ceases to have such a form—i.e. A I (iii). Yājñavalkya has tried to show that the soul is 'neither conscious nor unconscious after death and has no form'—i.e. C I (ii). The Brāhmanas often speak of a 'second death' after personal survival—i.e. A II (i).

The one-life-after-death theories held by people in the West who subscribe to different forms of Theism or Spiritualism are also classifiable as permutations and combinations of the above alternatives. Thus, the views held by those who subscribe to the belief that the soul survives as a discarnate spirit for all eternity or those who say that the soul goes to heaven or hell for eternity after death or those who maintain that the soul sleeps with the body till a day of judgement when its state is changed or those who believe that the soul goes to purgatory till a day of judgement — all these views are classifiable under the above scheme.

### **Materialists**

In sharp opposition to those who held dualist theories of body-and-soul and claimed that there was only a single life after death were the Materialists who denied a life after death altogether. Seven schools of such Materialists are referred to in the Brahmajāla Sutta and some of these are independently referred to in the non-Buddhist literature.



The most extreme of them held that there is no mind or soul apart from the body which was entirely a hereditary product of one's parents (*mātāpettika-sambhavo*) and the material elements. What we call 'mind' are the patterns of movement in our bodies. The modern version of this is called Central State Materialism (see J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), which tries to do away with phenomenal factors such as 'experience', 'consciousness' etc. According to this theory when we say that a person is happy, it refers not to a mental state but to a physical state which has among its consequences that it causes a person to behave in a characteristically happy way.

Another school held that the mind is an emergent product which has a material basis and its condition is determined by the food we eat. They argued that just as much as when we mix up certain chemicals in certain proportions, there emerges the intoxicating power of liquor, even so the material particles of the body and the food we eat go to form the mind, which is an emergent by-product. There were also schools of mystic materialists who by the use of drugs claimed the possibility of achieving expansions of consciousness (called *micchā-jhāna*, wrong *jhāna*, in the texts).

All these schools of materialists were characterised by the fact that they did not hold that mind and body were two different entities but were one and the same entity, either denying the reality of mental phenomena altogether or asserting that they were epiphenomena or accompaniments of the state of body (for modern versions see, *The Identity Hypothesis - A Critique*, in J. R. Smythies, *Brain and Mind*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1965)



## Sceptics

The dialectical opposition between the dualistic soul-theorists who asserted the reality of survival and the monistic materialists, who denied survival, had already resulted prior to Buddhism in the rise of several sceptical schools of thought. The Kaṭha Upanisad states : “This doubt is there with regard to a man deceased—‘he exists’ say some; ‘he exists not’ say others” (I.20).

The four schools of Sceptics (*amarāvikkhepikā*) in the Brahmajāla Sutta adopted scepticism on the basis of various intellectual or pragmatic grounds. Some maintained that in holding the view either that ‘there is survival’ or that ‘there is no survival’ there results an involvement or entanglement (*upādāna*) in a theory and this promotes mental unrest. Others argued that in holding or denying the theory of survival one is led by one’s prejudices for (*chanda*, *rāga*) or against (*dosa*, *paṭigha*) and that, therefore, truth demands that we do not come to any definite conclusions. Yet others avoided making definite pronouncements from fear of being engaged in debate. Others again like Sañjaya argued that statements about an after-life, about moral responsibility or transcendent existence were not verifiable and therefore it was not possible to discover their truth or falsity.

Among those who held a dualist hypothesis and asserted ‘the eternity view’ (*sassatadiṭṭhi*) were not only the single after-life theorists but those who held several variants of rebirth-theories as well. It is important to bear in mind the fact that Buddhism was opposed to all these theories, including the rebirth-theories that had been propounded. The Buddha did not posit the



existence of an unverifiable, unchanging entity to account for his theory of re-becoming and rebirth. Nor did he hold that the process of re-becoming was strictly determined by past karma, by natural causes or by the will of God. Causal factors were operative no doubt but they were not deterministic. Besides, some rebirth theories held that beings could be reborn even as “rice and barley, herbs, beans, sesame plants and trees” (Chandogya Up. 5. 13. 6). The Buddha did not subscribe to such a point of view. In fact, it is doubtful whether the Buddha held that there was rebirth at the lowest levels of life. The Buddha later recounts as a mistaken view some of the beliefs of Jainism, which he put to the test prior to his enlightenment. In one place he says: “I used to walk up and down conscientiously extending my compassion even to a drop of water, praying that the dangerous bacteria in it may not come to harm” (yāva udabindumhi me dayā paccupaṭṭhitā hoti: mā’ haṃ khuddake pāṇe visamagate sanghātaṃ āpādessanti, M. I. 78)

### **Buddhist Solution**

It is in the historical context outlined above, that the Buddha appeared on the scene and sought a solution to the riddle of life. It is, therefore, not correct to say (as many scholars have done) that the Buddha took for granted the belief in rebirth current in society at the time. As is evident from the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist literature, there was a variety of views on the question of survival at the time covering almost every possibility that one can think of.

Besides, the belief was not of very great antiquity. It is absent in the Vedas, it is merely hinted at in the



Brahmanas, and the early Upanisads present a variety of views, some of which clearly reject rebirth. By the time of the Buddha, the Materialists had made such an impact on society that the Buddha classifies the prevalent theories of his time as those of the Eternalists and the Materialists. In addition, scepticism was so rampant that the elite (the *viññū purisā*) did not subscribe to any specific belief. They were no doubt interested in the problem and people like Pāyāsi even performed experiments to test the validity of the belief in survival. One of the experiments carried out was that of weighing the body immediately before and after death (see *Dīgha Nik*, No. 23). Finally, an unquestioning acceptance of the belief in rebirth is hardly consistent with the spirit of the *Kālāma Sutta* where the Buddha asks people to adopt a critical attitude towards traditional beliefs.

The Buddhist theory of survival has its origin in the Enlightenment of the Buddha and not in any traditional Indian belief. It is said that it was on the night of his Enlightenment that he acquired the capacity to know his prior lives. It was when his mind was composed, clear, cleansed and without blemish, free from adventitious defilements, pliant and flexible, steadfast and unperturbed that he acquired this capacity to recall hundreds and thousands of prior lives and the prehistory of the universe, going back through the immensely long periods of the expansions and contractions of the oscillating universe. This is, in fact, called the first important item of knowledge, which broke through the veil of ignorance (*ayaṃ paṭhamā vijjā*).

The second important item of knowledge (*dutiya vijjā*) was obtained by the exercise of the faculty of clairvoyance (*dibba-cakkhu*), with which the Buddha was



able to see among other things the survival of beings in various states of existence, the operations of karma, galactic systems, clusters of galactic systems and the vast cosmos.

### **The Five States of Existence**

In the Mahāsīhanāda Sutta there is a reference to the five states of existence. They are as follows: (1) the lower worlds (duggati, vinipāta, niraya), (2) the animal kingdom (tiracchāna-yoni), (3) the spirit-sphere (petti-visaya), (4) human beings (manussā) and (5) devas or higher spirits.

While the “lower worlds” (vinipāta) are also called niraya (hells), we must not forget that “hells” (pātāla) in the popular sense are denied. It is said that the common man believes that there is a hell or nether world in the bottom of the ocean, but Buddha says that this belief is false and states that ‘hell’ is a term for painful sensations. Yet elsewhere there is a reference to worlds which the Buddha claims to see in which everything one senses is unpleasant and the thoughts that come to one’s mind are disagreeable and foul. In contrast, it is said that there are worlds in which everything one senses or experiences is pleasant. About the existence of devas, the Buddha says when asked the question as to whether they exist that he knows on good grounds that they exist. When further questioned as to why he used the qualification ‘on good grounds’, he says that it is because it is commonly taken for granted that devas or higher spirits exist (M. 100).

The five states of existence are graded according to the amount or degree of pain or pleasure experienced in



them. According to this description, the human world is one in which one experiences “more pleasant than unpleasant experiences” (sukhabahulā vedanā vediyamānam M. I. 75). In the spirit-sphere it is more unpleasant than pleasant. In the animal sphere it is unpleasant since animals are supposed to live in a state of constant fear with strong unsatisfied instinctive desires such as hunger and thirst. In the ‘lower worlds’ it is said to be very unpleasant. In the deva-worlds, on the other hand, it is extremely pleasant (ekanta-sukhā vedanā vediyamānam).

The person who is pictured as faring on in these states of existence is conceived as one who is oppressed by the heat, exhausted, afraid and thirsty. The lower worlds are compared to a pit of coals into which he falls, animal existence is a pit full of excrement, existence in the spirit-sphere is like coming under a tree in a desert without much shade, human life is compared to coming under a large and shady tree while the deva-world is compared to a well-furnished and beautiful palace. In contrast, Nirvāna is said to be analogous to the above person who is oppressed with heat, exhausted and thirsty reaching a lake where the waters are cool and clear, bathing in it, quenching his thirst and sitting or lying down in an adjoining glade, experiencing extreme happiness (ekanta-sukhā vedanā vediyamānam).

From the descriptions given in the early texts the usual tendency is for a person to survive as a departed spirit or a discarnate spirit in the spirit-sphere and come back to an earth-life since the normal character of human beings is a mixture of good and evil and the stage of evolution of one’s consciousness is attuned to existence in these worlds. But it is possible to regress



to animal or subhuman forms of existence by neglecting the development of one's personality or character and becoming a slave to one's passions. It is also exceptionally possible to attain to existence in the deva-worlds. In the Sankhāruppatti Sutta, it is said that a person who is possessed of faith (saddhā), virtue (sīla), learning (suta), selflessness (cāga) and wisdom (paññā) can aspire to and attain to better states of existence among human beings or devas.

### Intelligibility

The word used to describe the progression from existence to existence is the word 're-becoming' (punabbhava). Rebirth is only a special case of re-becoming when a person comes back to an earth-life. Rebirth in this sense takes place until a person attains to a spiritual state of Non-returner (anāgāmi) or Arhant. If there is any doubt about the interpretation of *punabbhava* as rebirth in these contexts, it may be dispelled by examining similar expressions such as "he does not come back to lie in the womb" (na punareti gabbhaseyyam, Sn. 99), used of an Arhant.

The question has been raised by some philosophers as to whether a conception of survival after death either in the form of rebirth or as a discarnate spirit is at all intelligible. If we preserve someone's heart or kidney in a living condition after his death, we would not say in respect of such an organ that so and so is now alive. It is therefore necessary that there should be some sense in which the reborn person or discarnate spirit should be able to claim identity with the dead person (when he was alive) even though all that can be established is continuity and not identity even in this life. To say



that both have the same soul will not help because the existence of such a soul as an unchanging agent or recipient of actions is unverifiable.

The solution to this problem lies in the criteria that we employ to claim personal identity. In a single human life we normally employ two criteria. One is the spatio-temporal continuity of the body. On the basis of this we can claim that so and so is a person who as a child went to such and such a school although there may be nothing in common between the two bodies as far as shape and content is concerned. The other criterion is memory on the basis of which someone may claim that he was such and such twenty years ago. When one life is concerned the two criteria normally support each other.

In the case of the reborn person or discarnate spirit it is the memory criterion alone which can establish the identity. In this case when the body criterion is employed, we have to say that 'he is not the same person' but when the memory-criterion is employed we would have to say 'he is not another person'. So according to Buddhism "he is neither the same nor another" (*na ca so na ca añño*) when we give a strictly accurate description although in common parlance we may say that he is the same person.

The logical possibility of such personal identity without a soul is granted by Professor A. J. Ayer of Oxford, a Logical Analyst who says: "I think that it would be open to us to admit the logical possibility of reincarnation merely by laying down the rule that if a person who is physically identified as living at a later time does have the ostensible memories and character of



a person who is physically identified as living at an earlier time, they are to be counted as one person and not two" (see, *The Concept of a Person*, London, 1963, p. 127).

As for the concept of a discarnate spirit, Professor H. H. Price, F. B. A., Emeritus Professor of Logic, University of Oxford, following the ideas of some Hindu and Buddhists texts (as he admits) has given an intelligible account of how a 'discarnate spirit' may be conceived of, consistent with the findings of modern psychology and psychical research (see, H. H. Price, *Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'*, in J. R. Smythies, *Brain and Mind*, International Library of Philosophy & Scientific Method, London, 1965, pp. I-33).

Although the majority of modern psychologists attempt to explain the functioning of the brain on mechanistic models, they find it difficult to explain away the fact and role of consciousness. Despite the claim of some philosophers (e. g. G/Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*), the ghost from the human machine has not been exorcised. Professor Sir John Eccles, who has been described by Sir Cyril Burt, F. B.. A, Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of London, as "the most eminent of living neurologists who have specialised in the study of the brain", has made the following statement about the structure and functions of the brain: "the structure of the brain suggests that it is the sort of machine that a 'ghost' might operate" where the word 'ghost' is used "to designate any kind of agent that defies detection by such apparatus as is used to detect physical agents" (*The Neurophysiological Basis of Mind*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 278 ff.) We can do without the concept of a permanent soul but it is doubtful whether



consciousness can be explained away, where it functions as a causal factor in initiating plans, making decisions etc.

The Buddha did not subscribe to the Dualist Hypothesis that “the mind and body are different” (aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sariraṃ) nor to the Identity Hypothesis that “the mind and body are the same” (taṃ jivaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ) but found that there was partial truth in both. Consciousness is partly formed by the impact of the environment on the living body but in turn it determines bodily behaviour.

In rebirth and rebecoming there is continuity of the stream of consciousness (viññāṇa-sota) without identity (anaññaṃ) making the recall of prior lives potentially possible. It is, however, not a self-identical permanent substance, which is quite independent of the body with regard to its growth and development.



## II

### THE BUDDHIST DOCTRINE OF KARMA

In this talk I merely propose to give a brief account of the Buddhist doctrine of karma, as it is taught in the texts. I do not intend to examine the case for or against it in the light of evidence. I shall undertake this in a later talk.

I refer to this doctrine specifically as the Buddhist doctrine of karma in order to distinguish it from the other non-Buddhist doctrines of karma, which were taught by non-Buddhist thinkers prior to, during and even after the time of the Buddha. In this respect, it is important to note the significant differences between the Buddhist doctrine of karma and the doctrines of karma taught in Jainism, by certain Ājivika thinkers as well as the Brahmins.

#### Misconceptions

This is particularly necessary since the Buddhist doctrine is often confused with and assumed to be the same as the Brahmanical doctrine of karma. People tend to speak of or criticise the doctrine of karma as though there was only one such doctrine common to different religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Ājivikism despite the fact that they profess different teachings about the nature, operations and attitude to the alleged phenomenon of karma.

Another misconception which is partly connected with the above misunderstanding is that the Buddhist doctrine of karma constitutes or implies a fatalist



attitude to life and nature, a view put forward by some (not all) Western scholars and even subscribed to by some local intellectuals both non-Buddhist and even Buddhist.

Yet another source of misunderstanding is the attempt on the part of certain scholars and other individuals to rationalise (quite unnecessarily) the doctrine of karma by interpreting it to mean the social or biological inheritance of man or both, ignoring altogether and distorting the authentic teachings of the texts of Buddhism.

### Meaning

In the pre-Buddhist literature the word karma was used mainly in the sense of either religious rituals or the social functions and duties of man. In the latter sense the *Isā Upanisad* says: "Let a man aspire to live a hundred years, performing his social duties" (*kurvanneveha karmāni jijīvisēcchataṃ samāh*, 2) This sense has survived in the Buddhist texts, where the word karma is used in the plural to denote the different professions or occupations of men. Thus, Buddhism recommends people to perform 'morally blameless occupations' (*anavajjāni kammāni*).

As a technical term, the word karma is used in the early Buddhist texts to denote 'volitional actions'. These actions may be 'morally good' (*kusala*), morally evil (*akusala*) or morally neutral (*avyākata*). They may be actions which find expression in bodily behaviour (*kāya-kamma*), verbal behaviour (*vacī-kamma*) and psychological behaviour (*mano-kamma*).



The morally good and evil actions are said to be liable to give rise to consequences, individual as well as social, pleasant and unpleasant on the whole as the case may be. The individual consequences may be manifested in this life, the next life or the lives to come unless their potentialities get extinguished or they do not find an opportunity for fruition.

Conscious volition (*cetanā*) is a necessary condition of such a morally good or evil act, but does not constitute the whole of it except when it happens to be a purely mental act. Thus, we would not be guilty of the crime of murder merely because we had the intention of murdering somebody. As the *Atthasālini* (p. 98) points out "there are five constituent factors in an act of killing: (i) the existence of a living being, (ii) the awareness of the existence of such a living being, (iii) the intention of killing, (iv) the effort or the means employed to kill and (v) the consequent death of the living being".

The intention is necessary but not sufficient to constitute an act of killing. As the Vinaya rules point out, where the intention is absent but one's actions are instrumental in causing the death of a person, one may be guilty of an act of negligence but not of murder.

So the word *karma* is used to denote volitional acts which find expression in thought, speech or physical deeds, which are good or evil and are liable to give rise to consequences, which partly determine the goodness or badness of these acts.

### **Basis for Doctrine**

It is often assumed that the basis for the doctrine of *karma* in Buddhism is a rational argument implicit in the



**Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta.** It is true that in this Sutta the Buddha seems to suggest purely rational grounds for believing in the doctrine of karma but it would be mistaken to believe that the doctrine is accepted as true or as representing the nature of things as they are on these grounds.

In this Sutta, a brahmin youth meets the Buddha and asks him for an explanation as to why among human beings some are short-lived while others are long-lived, some are sickly while others are healthy, some are ugly to look at while others are handsome, some have little power or influence while others are influential, some are poor while others are rich, some are of a lower social status while others are of a higher social status.

The question is posed in the form: “What is the reason and the cause for the inequality (*hīnappañātata*) among human beings despite their being human?”. The Buddha’s reply on this occasion was as follows: “Beings inherit their karma and it is karma which divides beings in terms of their inequalities”.

We may argue that this embodies the following rational ethical argument, consisting of an empirical and ethical premiss, viz. people are of unequal status, those of unequal status ought to be such only by virtue of their own actions—therefore, since this is not due to their actions in this life, it should be due to their actions in a prior life. This means that both karma and pre-existence are the case.

It is also true that this kind of rational ethical argument has appealed to many thinkers. Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), poet, dramatist and essayist



says:” Let us return to reincarnation . . . for there was never a more beautiful, a juster, a purer, a more moral, fruitful and consoling, nor, to a certain point, a more probable creed than theirs. It alone, with its doctrine of successive expiations and purifications, accounts for all the physical and intellectual inequalities, all the social iniquities, all the hideous injustices of fate.” (See, *Reincarnation, An East-West Anthology*, ed. Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, New York, 1961, p. 200). Professor Allan G. Widgery, Stanton Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge University (and later Professor of Philosophy, Duke University, U. S. A.) speaks appreciatively of such an argument when he says: “For it affirms that men are not born equal . . . and this affirmation appears to be more in accordance with the facts . . . Men are regarded as different at birth: the differences being due to the manner in which in past lives they have built up their nature through the action of the law of karma.” (Ibid., p. 117).

But it would be mistaken to consider the passage in the above Sutta as presupposing a rational ethical argument with a concealed ethical premiss. It is true as Ānanda has said of the Buddha that “so far as anything can be attained by reasoning (takka), thou has ascertained it” (yāvatakaṃ takkāya pattabbaṃ anuppattaṃ tayā, S. I. 56) but the doctrine of karma is not put forward in Buddhism as product of mere speculative reasoning (takka), which is not adequate for the discovery of the facts of nature as the Buddha has elsewhere pointed out. The Buddha’s statements even in this Sutta are based on clairvoyant observation and reasoning and not on mere rational speculation.



It is also mistaken to assume on the ground of the recognition of the fact of the known inequalities among mankind that Buddhism accepted the *status quo* of a static conception of society or denied the doctrine of what is known as 'the equality of mankind'.

For as we shall see when we come to the social and political philosophy of Buddhism, Buddhism upholds the biological, social and spiritual equality of mankind and envisages a time in the future when with the economic, moral and spiritual regeneration of man there would come into being a social order in which people would be healthy and long-lived and the inequalities in power, wealth and social status would be greatly diminished.

In this context, we must not forget that one of the central teachings of Buddhism revolves round the conception of the destruction or elimination of the evil effects of kamma (kammakkhaya) by effecting a change in the basis of human motivation from that of greed (lobha), hate (dosa) and ignorance (moha) to selflessness (cāga), compassion (mettā) and understanding (paññā). Even the better social order of the future can be set up only by people who believe in moral and spiritual values and have to some extent cultivated the qualities of selfless service, kindness and wisdom.

### **Verifiability**

As we have said above, the statements about the operations of karma are made by the Buddha on the basis of inference based on clairvoyant observation. The awareness of the nature of the operations of karma is said to be the second item of knowledge (dutiya vijjā) obtained by the Buddha on the night of his enlightenment.



It is said: "When his mind was thus composed, clear and cleansed without blemish, free from adventitious defilements, pliant and flexible, steadfast and unperturbed, he turns and directs his mind towards an understanding of the death and rebirth (*upapāta*) of beings. Then with his pure, paranormal, clairvoyant vision he sees beings—the high and the low, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the wretched—dying and being reborn according to their *character* (*kamma*)".

The three-fold knowledge (*tisso vijjā*) acquired by the Buddha, which is crucial for the attainment of enlightenment consists of the knowledge of pre-existence, of the operations of karma and of the capacity to eliminate the inflowing impulses (*āsava-kkhaṇa*). It is the same knowledge had by the arahants attaining emancipation of mind (*ceto-vimutti*) and in the Therā- and Therī-gathā, the psalms of the brethren and the sisters, we constantly meet with the refrain: "I have attained the three-fold knowledge, I have done the bidding of the Buddha" (*tisso vijjā anupattā kataṃ Buddhassa sāsanaṃ*).

The operations of karma are, therefore, personally verified by the Buddha and his disciples. In the Mahāsīhanāda Sutta, the Buddha refers to the way he tested the theory of karma as though he was testing scientific hypothesis.

It is said: "There are these five destinies, Sāriputta. What five? The lower worlds, the animal kingdom, the spirit-sphere (*petti-visaya*), human existence and the higher worlds. I know these lower worlds, the path which leads to them or the kind of conduct which takes you to that state of existence at death . . . . Herein,



Sāriputta, I comprehend the mind of a certain individual with my mind as follows: 'This individual is set on behaving in such a manner and follows such a mode of conduct that he is likely to be born in one of the lower worlds at death on the destruction of the body'. I then observe him at a later time by means of clear, clairvoyant, paranormal perception—the same individual born in one of the *lower worlds* at death experiencing *great pain*. Just as if there were a pit of coals and a man were to come along, tired and exhausted, taking a path leading straight and a man possessed of sight were to observe him and say to himself: 'This man is, surely, taking a path which will land him in a pit of coals' and later see him fallen in that pit experiencing great pain; even so . . . the *animal world* . . . experiencing *much unhappiness* . . . Just as if there were a cesspit and a man, tired and exhausted were to come along . . .; even so . . . the *spirit-sphere* . . . experiencing *more unpleasant than pleasant sensations* . . . Just as if there were a tree in a rugged place, with sparse foliage affording scanty shade and a man were to come along, tired and exhausted; even so . . . the *human world* . . . experiencing *more pleasant than unpleasant sensations* . . . Just as if there were a tree with dense foliage in a pleasant spot and a man were to come along, tired and exhausted . . .; even so . . . in a *higher world* . . . experiencing *extremely pleasant sensations* . . . Just as if there were a palace with all the comforts and luxuries and a man were to come along, tired and exhausted . . ."

In the Mahākammavibhanga Sutta, the Buddha points out that certain yogins who have acquired the capacity for clairvoyant observation, nevertheless, came to false conclusions and denied the fact of karma since they made invalid inferences from the observed data.



This is what he says: "Herein a certain yogin as a result of his efforts and application, attains a certain state of trance, in which he sees with his clear, clairvoyant, paranormal vision a man who has misconducted himself born at death on the dissolution of his body in a happier and better world. He concludes as follows: "There are no evil actions (kamma) and no consequence of misconduct, for I have observed a man . . ." "Everyone whether he misconducts himself in this life or not, is born at death in a happier and better world." I do not agree (says the Buddha) with the claim of this yogin that there are no evil actions and no future consequence of misconduct. I am prepared to grant that this yogin has observed a man who has misconducted himself in this life, born at death in a happier and better world. But I do not agree with his conclusion that, therefore, all people whether they misconduct themselves in this life or not, are born at death in a happier and better world. The knowledge of the Transcendent One (Tathāgata) with regard to operations of kamma is different . . . If a person who has misconducted himself in this life, is born at death in a happier and better world, then he has either some time in his past done good deeds, which have resulted in these experiences or at the time of his death, has changed his ways and adopted the right view of life."

The mistake that these yogins made, according to the Buddha, was to form generalisations on the basis of one or a few observations without observing a generality of cases and seeing that the apparent exceptions were explicable on other terms. The operations of kamma, it is said, are so complex that they are not fully comprehensible (*acinteyya*, A. II. 80) except to the vision and



understanding of a Buddha. Even with regard to the universe (loka-visaya), we noted that the Buddha could observe clusters of galaxies and the vast cosmos, while Anuruddha, the specialist in clairvoyance, could observe only a single galaxy.

### Relation to Causal Laws

The operation of these laws of karma was only a special instance of the operation of causal laws in nature, in which there were physical laws (utu-niyāma), biological laws (bīja-niyāma), psychological laws (citta-niyāma), karmic laws (kamma-niyāma) pertaining to moral acts and their consequences, and laws pertaining to spiritual phenomena (dhamma-niyāma). But the pattern of events in nature, according to Buddhism, were neither deterministic nor indeterministic.

Karmic laws, therefore, state tendencies rather than inevitable consequences. Several of these correlations are stated in the Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta. The general principle is that morally good acts tend to be followed by pleasant consequences and morally evil acts by unpleasant consequences in the long run to the individual. Since it is of the nature of good acts to promote the material and spiritual well-being of mankind, it follows from this general principle that one cannot gain one's own happiness at the expense of others.

Among the specific correlations are the following. Those who harm and hurt living beings tend to be sickly, while those who are compassionate towards them tend to be healthy. Those who are angry and irritable, scowl at and abuse people tend to be ugly, while the others who are not so, tend to be beautiful. Those who are envious and



jealous of the gain, honour and respect bestowed on others tend to lose respect while the others would tend to command respect.

### Medieval Analysis

In the medieval period we find kamma classified, first according to function (*kicca*) as what gives birth (*janaka*), what tends to support a tendency (*upatthambhaka*), what tends to obstruct a tendency (*upapīlaka*) and what destroys (*upaghātaka*). Secondly, according to the manner in which they come into fruition (*pāka-dāna-pariyāya*), they are classified as weighty (*garuka*), proximate (*āsanna*), habitual (*āciṇṇa*) and residual (*kaṭattā*). Thirdly, according to the time of taking effect (*pāka-kāla*) there are four sorts—what is experiencable in this life (*diṭṭha-dhammavedaniya*), in the next life (*upapajjavedaniya*), some time in the future (*aparāparavedaniya*) or never (*ahosi*). Fourthly, according to the locus in which the effects take place there is evil karma finding fruition in the worlds of sense-gratification, similar good karma and good karma which becomes effective in the subtle material worlds (*rūpa-loka*) and the immaterial ideational worlds (*arūpa-loka*).

### Distinction

It is necessary to distinguish the Buddhist theory of karma from the other non-Buddhist theories. Firstly, it has to be distinguished from the Jain theory, according to which man could not develop morally and spiritually without undergoing all the consequences of one's previous evil karma. The Jains hoped to achieve this by indulging in ascetic practices, which they believed helped to wear away the evil effects of past karma. The value of a moral



act, likewise, depended on its physical expression rather than the intention, unlike in Buddhism.

The Buddhist theory has also to be distinguished from an Ājivika theory which asserted that all present actions and experiences are strictly determined by previous karma. Karma according to Buddhism, while being non-deterministic was only one among many factors which conditioned the nature of the individual's experiences of pleasure and pain. Among them were the physiological state of the body, which was partly a product of heredity or the biological laws (*bīja-niyāma*) recognised in Buddhism. The other factors were changes in the physical environment (*utupariṇāma*), in social vicissitudes (*visama-parihāra*), the intentional activity of the individual (*opakkamika*) and lastly karma. Karma, it would appear, could operate separately in a psychosomatic manner or in co-operation with the other factors.

Since a number of factors operated in conditioning man's experience, it was wrong to say that pleasure and pain was due entirely to one's own actions (*sayamkatam sukhadukkham*), nor was it due to the action of an external agent like God (*paramkatam*), nor to a combination of both (*sayam katam ca param katam ca*), nor was it accidental (*adhicca-samuppanna*). Pleasure and pain were causally conditioned (*paṭicca-samuppanna*) and man by his knowledge of himself and nature could understand, control and master them.

### **Fatalism, Heredity and Karma**

Since karmic correlations were not deterministic, karma was only one of many factors conditioning the nature of experience and past karma was extinguishable



and modifiable in the context of one's present actions, it need hardly be pointed out that the Buddhist teaching of karma was not fatalistic. Buddhism, it may be noted, was opposed to all forms of determinism, natural determinism (*svabhāva-vāda*), theistic determinism (*issara-kāraṇa-vāda*) and karmic determinism (*pubba-kamma-vāda*) or any combination of them. According to one Brahmanical text, nature (*prakṛti*) compels man to act as he does, while nature itself is under the control or will of God.

According to Buddhism, man is conditioned by his heredity (*bīja-niyāma*), by his environment, physical, social and ideological (*salāyatana paccayā phasso*, etc.), by his psychological past (*citta-niyāma*) including his karmic heritage (*kamma-niyāma*) but he is not determined by any or all of them. He has an element of free will (*attakāra*), or personal endeavour (*purisa-kāra*) by exercising which he can change his own nature as well as his environment (by understanding it) for the good of himself as well as others. In this sense man is master of his fate (*attā hi attano nātho*).

The laws of heredity, likewise, are not to be confused with the laws of karma. Buddhism accepts both. As a result there may be situations in which the causal lines of karma and heredity coincide. A person may have a certain trait because he inherits it from one of his parents and also because he has a particular karmic reason or affinity to have it.

Sometimes in the case of mental traits, the origin may be karmic rather than hereditary. As Professor C. D. Broad (Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Cambridge) has stated in his examination of the philosophy of the late Professor John McTaggart of



Cambridge University, who urged a belief in rebirth and karma on philosophical grounds in his books *The Nature of Existence* and *Some Dogmas of Religion*: “McTaggart points out that the assumption of selective affinity between certain kinds of mind and certain kinds of organism would explain likenesses in mental characteristics between parents and children which are often ascribed to the direct influence of heredity. Owing to heredity a man’s organism will resemble those of his direct ancestors more closely than those of other people. Now similar organisms will be adapted to similar minds, and zygotes which will develop into similar organisms are likely to attract similar minds and unite with them at conception”. Professor Broad adds: “I think it must be admitted that this theory is ingenious and plausible” (*Examination of McTaggart’s Philosophy*, Vol. II, Part II, Cambridge University Press, 1938, pp. 614, 615). Besides, it can be seen how rebirth and karma can explain the (sometimes marked) temperamental differences in identical twins, who when they happen to be ‘Siamese twins’ have an identical and a common environment.

### Central Teaching

It must, however, not be forgotten that the central teaching of Buddhism is not that of continuing to perform good karma for the sake of rewards in continued samsaric existence (which cannot be enjoyed without the subsequent suffering from the evil which finds fruition) but the elimination of any karmic (i. e. rebirth-producing) action.

The immediate ideal of the Buddhist should therefore be that of attaining the first stage of spiritual development (sotāpanna) by the elimination of attachment to



notions of ego and ego-centred desires (sakkāya-ditṭhi), by elimination of doubts regarding the Buddhist account of the nature and destiny of man in the universe (vicikicchā) through examination, inquiry into and partial verification of the truth of the Dhamma and the realisation that religion is part and parcel of one's daily living and experience and not of obsessional attachment to rites and rituals (sīlabbataparāmāsa). Such a person is "not liable to fall below the status of human existence" (avinipāta-dhammo) and is destined to achieve the goal of enlightenment (niyato sambodhiparāyano) before long. This is the path leading to the destruction of karmic bondage (kamma-kkhaya) in which the good life is cultivated with the growth of selflessness, love and understanding for its own intrinsic worth and not for egoistic rewards.



### III

## THE CASE FOR THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF SURVIVAL AND KAMMA

### I

As we pointed out in our talk on *The Buddhist View of Survival*, it would be incorrect to represent the Buddhist conception of survival as being a simple doctrine of rebirth. If we use the word 'rebirth' to denote the view that immediately or some time after death we return to an earth-life then such rebirth is only a special case of re-becoming.

According to this Buddhist doctrine of re-becoming, there could be continuity of individuality in various planes of existence. We may survive as a discarnate spirit (Pali, *gandhabba* = Skr. *gandharva*) in the spirit-sphere (*petti-visaya*), as a denizen of a sub-human world or as an angelic spirit in the celestial planes of existence. Such survival, as the *Kathāvatthu* explains, is either in the gross material world (*kāma-loka*), the subtle material world (*rūpa-loka*) or the immaterial world (*arūpa-loka*). There is no intermediate existence (*antarābhava*) apart from existence in one of these three planes of becoming.

Since human existence is a mixture of good and evil, the usual pattern as the texts make out, is to survive as a discarnate spirit and come back to a human existence. The practice of Buddhism by the cultivation of faith (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), learning (*suta*), selflessness (*cāga*) and wisdom (*pañña*) makes it possible for a person to determine his future birth on the human or



celestial planes. A person who has become a non-returner (anāgāmin) need not come back to a human existence and an arhant will not be born again in the spatio-temporally and causally conditioned cosmos.

### Novel Theory

Besides, the Buddhist theory of survival, as we have already shown, is a novel theory which is not to be found in the pre-Buddhistic literature. It was a doctrine of survival without the concept of a self-identical substance or soul. The physical form, perceptions, feeling, will or intellect were not the soul, nor did the soul own them, nor was a soul to be found within them, nor again were they to be located in a cosmic soul. There was no self apart from a complex of psycho-physical processes and man was defined as a bundle of dispositions (suddha-sankhāra-puñja). Though there was no self-identical (anaññaṃ) substance, there was a continuity (santati, santāna) of individuality, sometimes referred to as a stream of consciousness (viññāṇa-sota) or a stream of becoming (bhava-sota). Associated with a person's present body were the dispositions with potentialities for re-becoming (ponobhaviko bhava-sankhāro).

These planes of existence and the operations of karma were observed by the Buddha on the night of his enlightenment. His knowledge consisting of "the recall of prior lives" (pubbe-nivāsa-anussati-ñāṇa) is described as follows :

"When his mind is thus composed, clear and cleansed without blemish, free from adventitious defilements, pliant and flexible, steadfast and unperturbed, he turns and directs his mind to the



recollection of his former lives, viz. one life, two lives . . . ten lives . . . a hundred lives . . . through evolving eons, recalling in what place he was born, his name and title, his social status, his environment, experiences and term of life and dying there in what place he was next born and so on up to his present existence. he remembers the varied states of his former lives in all their aspects and details. Just as a man who has travelled from his village to another and from that to yet another, when he returns to his former village by the same route, remembers how he came from village to village, where he stayed and rested, what he said and what he did; even so, when the mind is composed . . .” (D. I. 81)

Since the Buddhist theory of survival is a composite theory, the case in support of such a theory should include at least the arguments for survival as discarnate spirits as well as the arguments for rebirth.

Before we examine such arguments and the evidence, we have to meet the objection that the known facts of science concerning brain-mind phenomena suggest the impossibility of survival.

## Two Views

There are two classical views regarding the relationship between the mind and the body. One is the Identity Hypothesis, which either denies the reality of mental experience or holds that such experiences are inseparable from aspects of neural or brain phenomena. The other is Dualism, which holds that mental and neural phenomena interact



The extreme form of the Identity Hypothesis, called Central State Materialism, tries to do away with such factors as 'experience' or 'Consciousness' and explains psychological behaviour as being solely the functioning of the central nervous system. This would be a purely mechanistic theory.

A less extreme view, which is still monistic, is the psycho-somatic theory according to which psychological experience and brain phenomena are merely the two aspects of one reality. According to this theory the brain-mind combination does not function in a purely mechanical manner but since brain and mind are two aspects of the same process, they both cease to function with the death of the person.

A modern form of the Dualist theory would be the instrumental or the transmission theory according to which the brain would function as the instrument of the mind, being itself affected by it.

Buddhism which discards the monistic and the dualistic hypotheses, would hold that there is some truth in each without subscribing to either. For Buddhism the human being in normal consciousness is a psycho-physical unit, in which the physical and psychical phenomena are in a state of mutual dependence (*aññamañña-paccaya*). Yet at the same time aspects of will can control, govern and produce mental activity. Also, when the body is brought within control and is in a state of perfect composure with its activities stilled (*kāya-sankhārā niruddhā*), it can exercise its extra-sensory powers of perception.



Buddhism, therefore, while rejecting the Identity Hypothesis that “the mind and the body are the same” (taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ) and the Dualist Hypothesis that “the mind and the body are different” (aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ) finds partial truth in each and thus puts forward a middle view.

### Neurology

The ideal scientist in the field of neurology is not expected to subscribe to any particular point of view. As Dr. Wilder Penfield, Director of the Montreal Neurological Institute said in 1957: “Any scientist who looks up from his work to declare, for example, that the truth is to be found in monism or dualism, or that there is a middle ground ceases to be a scientist” (Quoted from Professor Hornell, *The Enigma of Survival*, Rider & Co., London, 1959, pp. 218, 219).

This does not, however, mean that the findings of scientists have no bearing on these theories. The advances made over the last fifty years are due to new electro-physiological techniques which have made it possible to stimulate single nerve fibres and record responses from single nerve cells, the measurement of the electrical activity of the brain (EEG-s), brain surgery and the study of the chemical basis of neural phenomena. They have shown that it is possible to alter somewhat the state of the personality or consciousness by physical or chemical means.

Consciousness, incidentally, cannot be argued or analysed away to the satisfaction of the extreme monists for it is a brute fact that certain physiological processes such as aspects of brain phenomena are accompanied by



consciousness or self-consciousness, though it could have been otherwise.

### Memory

At the same time, this research has also shown that there is no one-to-one correspondence between brain phenomena and mental experience as the psycho-somatic theory would like to maintain. Thus, memory is not uniquely located in particular points of the brain. Dr. H. O. Hebb states in 1953 that "it is very difficult to conceive of memory as a function of a localised region" (*Brain Mechanisms and Consciousness : A Symposium*, Published 1954).

Dr. Penfield records that when a specific point in the brain of a woman patient was touched, she heard a mother calling her little boy. But eleven minutes later when the same point was touched with the electrode, the patient no longer heard the mother calling her little boy but instead heard the voices of people calling from building to building. In another case, the patient heard the same song vividly when each of four different points in the brain were stimulated. Lord Brain, F. R. S., the eminent neurologist states: "Evidently in the brain, memory is not a unitary function nor is there any single part of the nervous system in which all memories are stored" (in "Some Aspects of the Brain-Mind Relationship" in *Brain and Mind*, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method, London, 1965, p. 69)

The lack of specific localisation is not confined to memory but is to be found in other functions as well. In 1912 Yerkes found that habits registered in one part of the nervous system of an earth-worm might shift later



on to another part and a similar versatility was to be found in human brains relative to the effects of brain damage in children by Klebanoff, Singer and Wilensky in 1954. A senior lecturer in zoology working mainly on the brain of rats, reports as follows: "Three of the preceding sections are headed respectively 'cortex', 'limbic system' and 'reticular system', but this anatomical arrangement does not correspond to the facts of function: the study of any of these systems soon becomes meaningless without reference to the others. During every few milliseconds, in the waking brain, information passes to and fro in a network of communication of which only the larger details are yet certainly known . . . In such a flux we cannot, with our present knowledge, properly speak of localisation of function, but only of the specific effects of injury or stimulation . . . A small injury can influence behaviour which certainly depends also on the functioning of the other parts; by contrast, some substantial injuries leave behaviour largely unaltered; and when behaviour is disturbed by lesions, there may be subsequent recovery due, evidently, to some compensatory process elsewhere. These facts at present defy explanation. All they do is to make accounts of neural function in terms of reflex arcs as absurd as interpretations of learning in terms of conditioned reflexes" (S. A. Barnett, *A Study in Behaviour*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1963, p. 238). In a recent BBC broadcast, Dr. Grey Walter speaking on "Mind, Matter and Machines" confessed the lack of knowledge about the nature of memory. He said: "No sketch of the contemporary world of brain research would be complete without a hue of mystery because this is what catches the mind's eye. For me there are two great obscurities in our picture: memory and sleep" (*Frontiers*



*of Knowledge*, Modern World Series, p. 99). Recently (April, 1968) Dr. Penfield confessed to the limitations of present scientific research. He says; "... The more we learn about the mechanisms within the brain, the clearer it becomes that science has not thrown any real light on the nature of the mind ... The only way the neurophysiologist works is to study the action of the brain on one side and the changing stream of mental activity on the other. You can see the parallelism of the activity but you cannot understand the inter-relationship" (Newsreport from Toronto *The Times Weekender*, Friday, April 12th 1968).

It is said that a circular stimulus figure that we observe as a circle will be far from circular when it is projected in the occipital lobe of the observer's cortex. So what we perceive as a circle is not circular in outline in the brain. The case is similar with our vision of three dimensional figures (W. Russell Brain, *Mind, Perception and Science*, Oxford, 1951, pp. 4-9).

### **Instrumental Theory**

The brain functions or is made to function as a whole and there is no one-to-one psycho-somatic correspondence between brain phenomena and the concomitant experiences. So despite the recent advance in biochemistry and micro-biology, mental phenomena cannot be considered to be just one aspect of a single process in the brain.

Professor Sir John Eccles, who has been described by Sir Cyril Burt as "the most eminent of living neurologists who has specialised in the study of the brain" has observed that "the structure of the brain suggests that it



is the sort of machine that a 'ghost' might operate" where the word 'ghost' is used "to designate any kind of agent that defies detection by such apparatus as used to detect physical agents" (*The Neurophysiological Basis of Mind*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 278 ff.)

This suggests that an instrumental theory of the brain cannot be excluded in the light of modern findings. We must not forget in this context that many physiological changes are initiated by the operation of aspects of will and that many diseases not only have a psychological origin (with or without a discoverable organic condition) but are curable by purely psychological means. We may note that physical pain with an organic basis can be relieved or removed by chemical means (i. e. drugs) or by the suggestions of hypnosis.

When in addition to all this, we have to take into account the realities of ESP (extra-sensory perception), the Identity Hypothesis becomes almost untenable although there was much to be said in its favour. Mr. John Beloff, a lecturer in psychology in the University of Edinburgh regards the parapsychological evidence as constituting the most damaging objection to any materialist theory of mind as envisaged in the Identity Hypothesis.

This is what he says: "This (i. e. parapsychological evidence), it seems to me, is the empirical reef on which the Identity Hypothesis is deemed to founder even if it can survive all other hazards. Most of its supporters do indeed recognise the danger but like Feigl, pin their faith to the ability of science to explain the ESP phenomena eventually along more or less conventional lines (obscure brain functions, unsuspected sources of



energy, etc.). Such faith though plausible enough twenty or thirty years ago is now increasingly unrealistic. The choice that confronts us today, I submit, is a very drastic one: either we must blankly refuse to credit the evidence or we must be prepared to accept a radical revision to the whole contemporary scientific world-picture on which materialism has taken its stand (*Brain and Mind*, pp. 50, 51).

That the parapsychological phenomena constituting ESP have come to stay and are presently accepted as valid by leading scientists, psychologists and philosophers is evident from a recent publication (1967) of a book called *Science and ESP* in the *International Library of Philosophy & Scientific Method*.

The brain may be compared to a computer and electronic machines can be constructed to perform certain operations of abstract thinking (such as logical and mathematical calculations) with a greater speed, precision and accuracy than the human mind is capable of. But however much such computers may simulate human behaviour, they cannot have psychological experiences, express personal behaviour as opposed mere imitation and have the degree of creativity and spontaneity that a human mind is capable of exhibiting.

Summing up recent scientific findings on the body-mind problem, Professor Hornell Hart states: "To look at the body-mind problem without bias, it is essential that we recognise two pivotal facts: (1) that damage to brain structure may block or distort what the 'I'-thinker wants to transmit; and (2) that the chemical condition of the brain has marked effects on the moods and attitudes of the 'I'-thinker himself . . . Whatever it



is that thinks 'I' in any one of us is not a constant, unchanging reality. Nor is it something which progresses smoothly and consistently along a regular trend" (*The Enigma of Survival*, p. 219).

### **Buddhist View**

All this seems to support the Buddhist theory of the mind, which holds that "conscious mental and cognitive phenomena function in dependence on its physical basis" (yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya manodhātu ca manoviññāḍadhātu ca vattati, *Paṭṭhāna*), that certain aspects of will can direct, govern and produce mental activity as well as verbal and bodily behaviour and that when the body and the brain are stilled with the attainment of the Fourth Jhāna (and sometimes even otherwise), the mind can exercise its powers of extra-sensory perception which are potentially present.

So none of the modern findings with regard to the mind and its relation to the brain nor the assertions of modern brain physiologists in any way preclude the empirical possibility of survival after death. This does not mean that survival after death is a fact but that it is an open possibility to be proved or disproved or made probable or improbable in the light of relevant evidence.

### **Other Objections**

There are other objections that are raised specifically against the concept of rebirth. They fall into three categories: (i) that rebirth is a self-contradictory concept, (ii) that it cannot account for the increase in the human population, which is a fact, and (iii) that biogenesis or reproduction by fission at the lowest levels of life are inexplicable on the basis of the rebirth theory.



The first objection is that the concept of rebirth involves the identity of two or more persons one of whom lives. It is held that the identification of two or more persons regarding them as one and the same person is either meaningless or self-contradictory. This is based on the belief that the identity of the person consists in the identity of the body, which is certainly the case in the law courts. But as the philosopher John Locke pointed out with specific reference to the case of rebirth, we also apply a mental criterion in our identification of persons.

If someone suffers from an attack of total amnesia, which involves a complete black-out of his past memories, resulting in a complete change of life, we would be inclined to say that he is now a new person, that he is not the same person as before. For example, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who have the same body are regarded as two different persons. This means that as regards the identity of persons, we normally employ two criteria, that of the continuity of the body and that of the continuity of memory and mental dispositions. In the rebirth case all that is claimed is that in a significant sense there is a continuity (*santati*) of the mind of the individual from one earth-life to another.

This makes it meaningful to say that two persons, historically removed from each other in time, are one and the same individual because they have a continuous mental history. The modern positivist philosopher, Professor A. J. Ayer of Oxford, granting the meaningfulness and the logical possibility of rebirth, says: "I think that it would be open to us to admit the logical



possibility of reincarnation merely by laying down the rule that if a person who is physically identified as living at a later time does have the ostensible memories and character of a person who is physically identified as living at an earlier time, they are to be counted as one person and not two" (*The Concept of a Person*, London, 1963, p. 127). The logical objection is, therefore, untenable.

The second objection is that it cannot account for the increase in human population. This objection would be valid if the theory requires that any human birth at present presupposes the death of a prior human being on this earth. Such a theory would also make it impossible for human beings to evolve out of anthropoid apes since the first human beings to evolve would not have had human ancestors.\* But according to the early Buddhist view of the cosmos, there are hundreds and thousands of galaxies spread out in space, containing "thousands of suns, moons, earths and other inhabited spheres". It is also the case according to the Buddhist theory of rebirth that the prior life of a human being may be animal. It is, therefore, possible according to this theory to account for the increasing number of present human births in terms of the deaths of human beings, animals or non-human beings in this as well as on other planets in the universe.

As regards the third objection from biogenesis, it can hardly affect the Buddhist theory. Although according to some Brahmanical theories, rebirth is possible even at the level of plants, it appears to be the

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\* It is of course possible that their samsaric ancestors were from other plans of existence.



case according to Buddhism that rebirth takes place at a higher level of evolution when a 're-becoming mind' has been formed with the persistence of memory. After his enlightenment, the Buddha refers to some of his Jain practices as an aspirant to Buddhahood in the following words: "I used to walk up and down conscientiously extending my compassion even to a drop of water, praying that the dangerous bacteria in it (*khuddake pāṇe visamagate*) may not come to harm" (M. I. 78). The context seems to suggest that this was a waste of time.



## IV

# THE CASE FOR THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF SURVIVAL AND KARMA

## II

In examining the case for the Buddhist theory of survival and karma, we took up for consideration in our last talk certain objections which may be levelled against the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. The first of these was that modern discoveries about the nature of mental phenomena and the relationship between the brain and the mind ruled out any possibility of a survival hypothesis being true. We pointed out, on the contrary, that in the light of modern findings regarding the brain-mind relationship and the assertions of leading brain physiologists, the empirical possibility of survival after death remained an open possibility.

### Body-Mind Problem

The case against the possibility of survival in the light of what we know about the mind is fully stated in a book by Dr. C. Lamont called *The Illusion of Immortality* (Philosophical Library, New York, 1950). A sound criticism of its contents is to be found in Ch. XIII of a book by Dr. C. J. Ducasse, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Brown University, called *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life after Death* (Illinois, 1961).

The Buddhist theory of the relationship between body and mind can account for the basic facts stated in Lamont's book as well as the criticisms of Ducasse. Lamont's case is based on the following facts:



- (a) that "the power and versatility of living things increase concomitantly with the development and complexity of their bodies in general and their nervous systems in particular".
- (b) that "the genes or other factors from the germ cells of the parents determine the individual's inherent physical characteristics and inherent mental capacities".
- (c) that, during the course of life "the mind and the personality grow and change, always in conjunction with environmental influences, as the body grows and changes".
- (d) that "specific alterations in the physical structure and condition of the body, especially in the brain and cerebral cortex, bring about specific alterations in the mental and emotional life of a man".
- (e) that "conversely, specific alterations in his mental and emotional life result in specific alterations in his bodily condition".

(see, Ducasse, *op. cit.*, p. 114)

Ducasse shows that (e) contradicts Lamont's contentions against Dualism. He further cites the case of psycho-somatic disease to show that primarily mental states cause physical changes in the body. Psycho-somatic medicine, for example, today recognises the fact that mental states such as anxiety, tension and worry sometimes cause painful stomach ulcers.



Now what is the Buddhist theory? Buddhism clearly holds that conscious mental and cognitive experiences function in dependence on a physical basis. A statement in the *Paṭṭhāna* reads as follows: “That physical basis in dependence on which the category of mental experience (maṇo-dhātu) and the category of cognitive experience (maṇo-viññāna-dhātu) function, this physical basis is to the category of mental experience and the category of cognitive experience and to phenomena associated with them, a condition by way of dependence” (nissaya-paccaya).

Because of this dependence it is not surprising that (a) is true and (d) occurs, namely the alterations in the physical basis resulting in alterations in the nature of consciousness.

Yet the dependence is not one-sided. As the Buddhist texts elsewhere state, “the mind follows in the wake of the body” (kāyanvayaṃ cittaṃ) and “the body follows in the wake of the mind” (cittanvayo kāyo). The relation between the psyche (viññāṇa) and its hereditary psychophysical basis (nāmarūpa) is one of “mutual dependence” (aññamañña paccaya). The will and other psychological factors can initiate some of the mental and physical changes that take place as suggested in (e).

Again, since according to Buddhism, the psychophysical basis of our bodies is partly due to what is derived from mother and father and ‘biological laws’ (bīja-niyāma) operate, it is not surprising that (b) is *partly* true, namely that genetic factors condition our physical and some of our mental characteristics.

When the Buddha told Sāti that it was wrong to hold that consciousness fares on from life to life without



change of identity (anaññaṃ) he illustrated this by showing that consciousness was causally conditioned. It is conditioned by the state of our body, which is partly a product of hereditary factors. It is also conditioned by the external environment. On account of the eye and visual phenomena, there arises in us visual consciousness. Similarly in respect of the other senses, there arise forms of consciousness associated with their respective sense-objects.

Likewise, it is said, that on account of the impact on the conscious mind (mano) of ideas (dhammā), there arise various forms of conceptual consciousness. When these ideas do not come to us through language from our social and external ideological environment, they impinge on the conscious mind from our own unconscious. As a result of this our consciousness changes and grows and this in turn affects our subsequent behaviour. This is how the Buddha explains to Sāti that the psyche (viññāṇa) is not an unchanging entity but is in a state of dynamic growth and becoming in close association with the conditioning of the body.

In the case of visual stimuli etc., they physically affect the senses in giving rise to their respective impressions (paṭigha-samphassa) but in the case of ideas that arise in the mind in remembering, imagining, thinking etc., the contact with the conscious mind is said to be only conceptual (adhivacana-samphassa).

It is these impressions and ideas and their by-products that accumulate in our memory and form part of our mind. So what is stated in (c), namely that "the mind and personality grow and change always in conjunction with environmental influences as the body grows



and changes'' is partly true. As we have seen above, it is stated in the Buddhist texts themselves.

So while Buddhism holds that the person is a psycho-physical unit (*nāmarūpa*), it does not subscribe to the Identity hypothesis that the mind and the body are one and the same entity or to the Dualistic hypothesis that the mind and the body are entirely different.

Besides, Buddhism holds that if awareness (*sati*) can be retained while the impressions and ideas that impinge on the conscious mind are inhibited, the activity of the body is gradually stilled and the emotions of sensuous desire (*kāmacchanda*) and hate (*vyāpāda*) subside, then the mind being intrinsically resplendent (*pabhassara*) gradually acquires certain extra-sensory powers of perception (*abhiññā*).

° What we outlined earlier was the relationship of the conscious mind (*manodhātu*, *manoviññādhātu*) to its physical basis but we must not forget that according to the Buddhist theory, the "stream of consciousness" has two components without a sharp division between them (*ubhayato abbocchinnaṃ*), the conscious mind and the unconscious, in which accumulate the emotionally charged experiences that we have had, going back through childhood and birth into previous lives. Besides, with the expansion and development of consciousness (*vibhūta-saññī*), it attains a paranormal state.

How much of our memories in the unconscious are associated with the brain? Do they include the memories of prior lives as well? What is the nature of the association between the potentially paranormal mind and the brain? Does the paranormal mind function at its best when the activity of the brain and the body is



quiescent (*kāyasankhārā niruddhā*) under its control? The total psyche (*viññāṇa*) of a person comprising the conscious mind, the memories and dispositions in the unconscious and the potentially paranormal mind is said to be “associated with and linked to the body” (*ettha sitaṃ ettha paṭibaddhaṃ*). But it is not clear how close or how loose the association of its several aspects are.

The Buddhist texts speak of two forms of telepathy, direct and indirect. Indirect telepathy, it is said, is had “by attuning oneself with the thought-vibrations of a person as he thinks” (*vitakkayato vitakka-vipphāra-saddaṃ sutvā*). Direct telepathy does not require this mediating process. Is the activity of the brain required for indirect telepathy while it is unnecessary for direct telepathy?

In our previous talk we tried to show that the modern findings in regard to the mind and its relation to the brain do not preclude the possibility of survival after death. While reiterating this point we tried to give here a more detailed account of the Buddhist solution to the body-mind problem.

The arguments of the critics from the nature of the mind and its relation to the brain, if valid, would hold against any theory of survival after death including the Buddhist. The other objections which we dealt with in our previous talk could only be levelled against a rebirth theory. They were, that rebirth was a self-contradictory concept in that it claimed that many persons were one and the same person, that it could not account for the increase in the human population and that biogenesis or a-sexual reproduction at the lowest levels of life was inexplicable on the basis of a rebirth theory.



If any of the above arguments were valid, they would have shown that a rebirth theory was not merely improbable but impossible. But we saw that the arguments were based on false premises and did not affect the Buddhist theory of rebirth. Where there was continuity of mind in the form of actual or potential memory and mental dispositions, then in popular parlance, we can speak of the many lives of one person. The increase of population would not present a difficulty where pre-existence could be in the form of animal lives or those of non-human beings in this as well as other planets in the universe. Biogenesis ceases to be a problem if rebirth takes place only at a higher level of biological evolution.

### **Another Objection**

° One of the commonest objections against a theory of rebirth, which implies pre-existence, is that we do not remember our past lives. The objection may take three different forms. First, that we do not have any memory of prior lives and that, therefore, there is no evidence of our having lived in the past prior to our present birth. Secondly, that memory is indispensable to the identity of a person. Thirdly, that unless we have memory, rebirth is to no purpose, since no moral or other lesson is learnt in the process.

We may first dispose of the third form of this argument. We are concerned only with the question as to whether rebecoming or rebirth is a fact and not whether it is a good thing to be reborn. We cannot argue from what ought to be or what is best to what actually is the case. It is generally admitted that such an argument has no basis in fact, since if it is true, the



world would be very much different from what in fact it is. Besides, there is a variety of rebirth theories and the question as to which one is true cannot be made on the basis of the ethical consideration as to which one is the best to believe in. For, quite apart from differences of opinion as to what is best (whether, for example, it would be better to remember or not to remember), there is no justification, as we have shown, in arguing that what is best is in fact the case.

The second form of the objection is that memory is indispensable to the identity of a person. If by this is meant that unless a person has authentic memories of a past life, we cannot be at all certain that he is the same as one who lived before, there is some substance to this objection. But it would not be necessary to prove that this was so in the case of all people.

If a sufficient number and variety of people can be shown to have such authentic memories, then although we may not be able to identify the prior lives of other human beings, it would be a reasonable presumption that they too had prior lives and are potentially capable of remembering this at some time or another.

To come back to the first form of the objection that we have no memory of having lived before, then, if rebirth is a fact, it is certainly not true of all human beings that they do not recollect their prior lives. For, there are at least a few who do while many others could be assisted to recall their previous lives.

It is possible, of course, to argue that the lack of memory regarding prior lives is no proof that we have not lived before, any more than lack of memory



regarding the first year of our lives on the part of all or most human beings is no proof that we did not live in the first year of our life. It is true that mere absence of memory of a certain event or phase of life is no proof that such an event did not take place or that we did not live through such a phase of life.

Yet this is an argument from silence. In the case of our present life, we have another criterion to go on, namely, the criterion of bodily continuity and other people can testify to the fact that we existed in the first year of our lives and lived through certain experiences. But in the case of rebirth we have no evidence at all if we do not have actual or potential memories. Memory is, therefore, very relevant to the problem of rebirth.

However, it is necessary to point out that the word 'memory' is used in two senses. In a secondary sense, 'having a memory' is a matter of retaining a skill or capacity that we acquired. If someone learnt how to swim when he was a child and can now swim very well without having to re-learn it and without even being able to recall that he learnt to swim as a child, we still say that he remembers how to swim though he has forgotten that he had learnt it as a child.

If rebirth be the case, is it not likely that some of the capacities or skills we have or acquire without much difficulty in this life may be due to our having learnt them in a prior life, especially where they cannot be fully accounted for in terms of heredity or learning in this life ?

The explanation not only of capacities and skills but of differences of temperament or 'weaknesses', which



also fall into this category, would have to be the same. Now identical twins (as opposed to fraternal twins) are said to have the same heredity and when they happen to grow up as 'Siamese twins' conjoined each other, they have more or less a common environment. Now if individual differences and variations are due entirely to the factors of heredity and environment alone, there should be identity of temperament and character on the part of these twins. At least there should not be marked differences in their dispositions and temperaments. But the facts are otherwise.

Dr. H. H. Newman, Professor of Zoology, University of Chicago, who made a specialist study of twinning, says with regard to the original 'Siamese twins', Chang and Eng : "The author of a study made when the twins were in London was impressed with the lack of any strong resemblance between Chang and Eng. Much emphasis was placed on their different dispositions and temperaments. Chang was inclined to drunkenness, while Eng was a teetotaler" (*Multiple Human Births*, New York, 1940, pp. 64, 65).

With regard to these identical twins, in general, his observations are as follows : "In describing several pairs of these strange twins, writers have commented upon their lack of close similarity. Such twins have been regarded as the only kind of twins that are beyond question derived from a single egg and therefore surely identical in their hereditary make-up. One would expect such twins, since they have not only a common heredity but a common environment (for they must be in the same environment all the time), to be even more strikingly similar than pairs of separate twins that are



not so intimately associated. The fact is, however, that Siamese twins are almost without exception more different in various ways than any but a very few pairs of separate one-egg twins. One of the most difficult problems faced by the twinning specialist is that of accounting for this unexpected dissimilarity of the components of Siamese twin pairs" (op cit., pp. 67, 68).

Could this difference not be due to a third factor other than heredity and environment, namely, the psychological past of the two individuals? If so, is it not likely that even in other individuals as well there could be capacities, skills, temperaments, weaknesses etc., which are due to 'memories' (in the secondary sense defined above) of prior lives rather than to the factors of heredity and environment? Geniuses or child prodigies, whose extraordinary accomplishments cannot be accounted for in terms of heredity or environment would only be special cases of such a carry over of skills from one life to another.

Apart from the use of the word 'memories' in the above secondary sense, we use the word in its primary sense to denote the 'recall of authentic experiences of one's past'. In this sense there are quite a few who have claimed to have remembered experiences of their alleged prior lives. Some of them are spontaneous cases of recall while others are due to the intervention of hypnotists, who have carried out age-regression experiments. How authentic are these memories and what reason have we to believe that they are potentially present in many if not all human beings? These are questions that we shall seek to answer in our subsequent talks on this subject.



## V

# THE CASE FOR THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF SURVIVAL AND KAMMA

## III

It may be useful to summarise briefly the argument so far.

The Buddhist doctrine of re-becoming (*punabbhava*) was a novel theory in so far as it spoke of survival without a self-identical soul or substance. There was continuity (*santati*) of personality after death and rebirth or the return to an earth-life was only a special case of such continuity. The doctrine was propounded after taking into account all the possible theories that could be advanced with regard to the problem of an after-life.

The Buddhist doctrine of *karma* merely taught that there was a correlation between moral acts and their consequences without implying any sort of fatalism. In fact, its implications were the very opposite of fatalism in that man by his understanding of his own nature could control his present and determine his own future.

In the two previous talks we examined some of the objections that could be levelled against this doctrine of re-becoming. We investigated the objection against any theory of survival from the alleged state of relationship that exists between the brain and the mind and found that the evidence against the possibility of survival was by no means crucial. Survival is neither proved nor disproved in the light of the modern findings



regarding the brain-mind. Any theory of survival, therefore, stands or falls on the basis of independent evidence.

We also examined some of the objections raised specifically against rebirth. We found that the objection that rebirth was a self-contradictory concept was not valid since we can speak significantly of a single individual having many lives where there is a continuity of memory and mental dispositions. The argument from the increase in the human population could not be levelled against the Buddhist theory of rebirth since Buddhism entertained the possibility of prior lives among animal, human, or non-human ancestors in this or other planets. The objection from biogenesis was also not valid since rebirth took place at a higher level of animal evolution.

The objection from the lack of memory of prior lives was far from true. Memory may be used in one of two senses, (i) the recall of genuine experiences of one's past, and (ii) the presence of capacities and skills acquired in the past. In the second sense we found that there was some evidence for the existence of such 'memories'.

Identical twins when joined together (called 'Siamese twins') have a common heredity and common environment. Yet psychologists have observed that they differ in character and temperament. It is likely, therefore, that this difference is due to a third factor (other than heredity and environment), namely the 'carry over' of past skills and attitudes from prior lives. Geniuses or child prodigies, whose extraordinary accomplishments cannot be accounted for in terms of



heredity or environment would only be special cases of such a 'carry over' of skills from one life to another.

In the former sense of memory, namely of 'the recall of genuine experiences in one's past', it is claimed that there is evidence of the recall of genuine experiences from prior lives. Such claims have to be carefully examined.

### **Unsatisfactory Arguments**

Yet, before we proceed to do so, it is necessary to dispose of some unsatisfactory arguments that are sometimes adduced in support of the doctrine of rebirth. They may take many forms.

There is a tendency to urge that some belief is true because almost everybody holds it. Yet the universality of a belief does not entail its truth. Nor at the same time does it entail its falsity. It is sometimes maintained that many primitive peoples of the ancient world believed in survival or the doctrine of rebirth. But this does not imply that the belief is either true or false. Its truth or falsity has to be established independently.

The relevance of the universality of the belief as evidence of its truth becomes more interesting when it is realised that everyone in a state of deep hypnosis gives an account of experiences in alleged prior lives, lived on earth, whatever their conscious beliefs may be. There is evidence that Materialists and Theists holding a variety of views on the subject of survival after death without subscribing to the doctrine of rebirth or pre-existence, give alleged accounts of prior lives, recounting details of their experiences.



Does this imply the truth of the belief? Not necessarily, for it is possible that all their beliefs could be illusory, though the universality of such an illusion has to be accounted for. But the experiences they recount certainly constitute evidence for the truth or falsity of the belief in rebirth. We shall carefully examine this evidence later on.

Another form in which an argument for survival is presented, is that a human need or want implies the existence of what is needed or wanted. We need or want food. Therefore, it is suggested, there must be food. Many people feel the need for immortality or at least survival after death. Therefore, it is suggested, there must be such immortality or survival.

However, this is an argument that cuts both ways. For others may argue that we believe in rebirth or survival because we need to believe or desire to entertain such a belief. But what we like to believe is not necessarily true and, therefore, this is no evidence of the truth of the belief.

Freud in his work called *The Future of an Illusion* tries to show that people entertain certain religious beliefs like the belief in the existence of God, for instance, because there is a deep-seated craving in us for security amidst the insecurity of life and the uncertainty of the beyond. According to him people believe in God dogmatically because of such a deep-seated craving. It is an object of wish-fulfilment and in this special case, an 'illusion'.

This does not, however, necessarily mean that the belief is false. As Freud himself pointed out, a girl may



believe in the existence of a Prince Charming who may one day come and propose to her; because she likes to believe this does not necessarily mean that such a person does not exist. So the desire to believe in rebirth or survival does not necessarily show that the belief is false just as much as the desire to disbelieve in rebirth does not imply that the contrary belief is false.

The Buddhist view on this matter is both relevant and interesting. Our desires influence or condition our beliefs, to which we tenaciously cling (*taṇhā paccayā diṭṭhupādānaṃ*) but this does not necessarily mean that these beliefs are always false for when they happen to be 'right beliefs' (*sammā diṭṭhi*), they are in fact true.

So although desires affect our beliefs, this fact has no relevance to the truth or falsity of the beliefs. We have, however, because of our emotional involvement with these beliefs to weigh the evidence for or against their truth or falsity without prejudice. As Buddhists we have to examine the truth even of the belief in rebirth objectively without being prejudiced for (*chanda*) or against (*dosa*) or being affected by fear (*bhaya*) even if it be the fear of the beyond, or being guided by our erroneous beliefs (*moha*). So the desire to believe or not to believe does not affect the truth or falsity of the belief but we have to guard against the prejudice resulting from these desires in our quest for truth.

### **Authority and Revelation**

Another set of arguments for survival are based on authority. It may be stated that many poets and mystics as well as rational thinkers brought up in a



tradition which condemned the belief, nevertheless professed it.

The classic case is that of Giordano Bruno, who is said to have stated in his profession of faith before the Inquisition: "I have held and hold souls to be immortal . . . Speaking as a Catholic, they do not pass from body to body, but go to Paradise, Purgatory or Hell. But I have reasoned deeply, and, speaking as a philosopher, since the soul is not found without body and yet is not body, it may be in one body or in another, and, pass from body to body. This, if it be not (proved) true, seems, at least, likely . . ." (See, REINCARNATION, and East-West Anthology, Ed. J. Head & S. L. Cranston, New York, 1961). Over two hundred and fifty well-known poets, philosophers and writers of the Western world have either held or professed some sort of belief in rebirth.

All that this seems to suggest is that the belief is worth examining and it does not in any way imply the truth of the belief.

The argument from revelation is also unacceptable to science and Buddhism. It is true that certain texts in the Vedic tradition, particularly the middle and late Upanisads, profess a belief in rebirth but there is a variety of views on the subject of survival in the Vedic tradition itself. In one of the early Upanisads rebirth is denied. It is said: "... there are these three worlds, the world of men, the world of departed spirits and the world of the gods. The world of men is obtained through a son only, not by any other means" (Brhad Āraṇyaka Upanisad, 1.5.15).



While there are these contradictions within revelational traditions, the different theistic revelations also contradict each other on the problem of survival. So the doctrine of rebirth cannot be established by an argument from authority or revelation, since authority and revelation are not acceptable means of knowledge.

### **Metaphysical and Ethical Arguments**

The metaphysical arguments are no better. Apart from the fact that they make use of unverifiable concepts like 'soul', the arguments are of doubtful value and are generally discredited today. One of the traditional arguments for survival has been that the 'soul is a substance, substances are indestructible, therefore the soul is indestructible, i. e. immortal'. But apart from the difficulty of the concept of a 'soul', the notion of 'an indestructible substance is discredited today.

With regard to rebirth, we have already met with a sample of such a metaphysical argument in that of Giordano Bruno (see above). Such arguments, based on pure reasoning, intended to prove the truth of rebirth, are to be met with, for example, in a work by Professor John McTaggart of Cambridge, called "Some Dogmas of Religion" (Ch. IV). But they have little appeal today since it is recognised that matters of fact cannot be proved by pure reasoning (*takka*), as the Buddha himself pointed out (*mā takka-hetu*).

The ethical argument has a greater appeal but this is so only for those who accept its presuppositions. We have already stated this in our talk on "The Buddhist Doctrine of Karma". Here we pointed out that according



to the Buddha, *karma* was one of the predominant factors responsible for human inequalities.

This has often been represented as embodying the following rational ethical argument consisting of an empirical and ethical premiss, viz. "people are of unequal status, those of unequal status ought to be such by virtue of their own actions—therefore, since this is not due to their actions in this life, it should be due to their actions in prior lives. This means that both pre-existence and *karma* are the case."

This is an argument that has appealed to many thinkers down the ages, but most modern thinkers would not accept the second ethical premiss, namely that "those of unequal status ought to be such by virtue of their own actions". This is because most people believe today that the universe of nature is amoral and there is no ethical reason why anything should or should not be so. On the other hand many hold that ethical statements are neither true nor false. It is nevertheless a fact that many people brought up in a belief in the inherent justice of nature ask questions of the form, 'why should so and so be born healthy while I am in a state of ill-health from birth etc.'

It is only the modern scholars who have made an argument of this since the Buddha merely stated as an observed fact that the predominant cause of these inequalities was *karma*. The fact is in principle unverifiable but the argument appeals to one's moral sense and is of value only if such a moral sense is universally present and shared by all mankind.



## The Evidence

The above arguments are, therefore, for one reason or another, unsatisfactory and have little force in proving the truth of rebirth or survival. The truth or falsity of rebirth, therefore, rests on the relevant empirical evidence.

We may classify the main evidence into two sorts, (i) experimental and (ii) spontaneous. The other evidence may be considered separately.

The experimental evidence is based on age-regression. Under hypnosis a subject can recall or relive his past experiences. With regard to this life when regressed to age six, for instance, the subject would behave, write and talk as he or she did at that time and recall the past experiences, which it may not be possible to recall by normal means. The handwriting and the memories could be independently checked. Such experiments have convinced psychologists and psychiatrists today that the authentic buried memories of one's childhood experiences, which cannot be called to mind in normal consciousness, can be unearthed by hypnosis.

It may be asked whether the subject is not just responding to the suggestions of the hypnotist and is merely play-acting or shamming. That this is not so has been proved experimentally.

Dr. H. J. Eysenck, who was Professor of Psychology in the University of London and Director of the psychological Department at the Institute of Psychiatry, Maudsley and Bethlem Royal Hospitals, states that "in one case it was found that when a twenty-year-old girl was regressed to various ages she changed the chalk to



her left hand at the six-year level; she had started writing with the left hand, but had been forced to change over at the age of six". (*Sense and Nonsense in Psychology*, Pelican Books, A 385, Reprint 1961, p. 48).

In another case a thirty-year old was hypnotised and regressed to a level of about one year of age on a chair arranged in such a way that with the release of a latch it would fall back into a horizontal position. When the latch was released the behaviour elicited was not that of an adult but of a child. An adult, it is said, would quite involuntarily extend both arms and legs in an effort to maintain balance. Since the subject made no movement of the limbs but screamed in fright and fell backward with the chair, urinating in the process, Eysenck comments: "It is unlikely that such behaviour is simply due to play-acting" (*Ibid.* p. 49).

Intelligence and achievement tests have been used to assess the nature of the behaviour of regressed subjects and it has been found that "people tend to behave on tests of this type in a manner roughly appropriate to the given age". Eysenck's observations with regard to the possibility of faking such behaviour, are as follows: "Such reactions, of course, could easily be faked, but it has been shown that when, for instance, the eye movements of subjects are photographed, a considerable lack of ocular co-ordination and stability is found when regression to a relatively young age occurs. Such physiological phenomena are characteristic of young children and are difficult, if not impossible, to produce voluntarily" (*Ibid.*, p. 49).

A remarkable fact is that the psychological experiences had when the physiological condition of the



body was different, are re-enacted. To quote Eysenck again: "Even more impressive is another case of a subject who had a colloid cyst removed from the floor of the third ventricle. Prior to this removal, the subject had been suffering from blindness in the left half of the right eye. After the operation, vision had become normal, but when the subject was regressed to a time shortly before the operation the visual defect again re-appeared during the regression" (*Ibid.*) The expected physiological reaction is not only appropriate to the age but reflects the physiological condition of the body at the time.

In the light of the experimental evidence Eysenck concludes: "Experiments such as those described in some detail above leave little doubt that there is a substantial amount of truth in the hypothesis that age regression does, in fact, take place, and that memories can be recovered which most people would think had been completely lost" (*Ibid.*, p. 51). This is the consensus of opinion among orthodox psychologists today.

So genuine memories not accessible to normal recall are generally evoked or the experiences relived at the suggestion of the hypnotist in age-regression. So at least as far as this life is concerned, to say that the memories recalled under age-regression are hallucinatory or delusive is not correct. We shall take up for consideration later in the light of the experimental data, the question as to whether the recall of alleged experiences of prior lives under hypnotic regression is hallucinatory.



## VI

# THE CASE FOR THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF SURVIVAL AND KARMA

## IV

In our last talk we stated that the evidence for the doctrine of rebirth was mainly of two sorts. There was (1) the experimental evidence from age-regression and (2) the spontaneous evidence based on a historical study of people, mainly children, from different parts of the world who claimed to recall their alleged prior lives. There is also a category of evidence which may be considered apart from the above two.

### Age-Regression

The experimental evidence is based on age-regression. In this experiment the subject is hypnotised and gradually taken back in time to the past. In the course of this the subject recalls and relives past experiences. Much of these experiences cannot be evoked by normal memory. These experiments have proved to the satisfaction of modern psychologists and psychiatrists that authentic memories of this life, which cannot be called to mind in normal consciousness, can be recalled by these means.

We quoted in our last talk the view of Dr. H. J. Eysenck, who was Professor of Psychology in the University of London, namely that "there is a substantial amount of truth in the hypothesis that age-regression



does, in fact, take place and that memories can be recovered which most people would think had been completely lost". This is, in fact, the consensus of opinion among orthodox psychologists today on the basis of the experimental findings. Dr. L. M. Wolberg observes: "The consensus at the present time is that regression actually does produce early behavior in a way that obviates all possibility of simulation. This is the opinion of such authorities as Erickson, Estabrooks, Lindner, and Spiegel, Shor and Fishman. My own studies have convinced me of this fact, although the regression is never stationary, constantly being altered by 'the intrusion of mental functioning at other levels'" (*Medical Hypnosis*, Vol. I).

It is a remarkable fact that in the course of these age-regressions even the physiological condition of the body undergoes changes appropriate to the past time at which the subject is having the experiences concerned, even when the present state of the body or the physical environment cannot be responsible for this. Drs. Brennan and Gill report a case where a patient some months after being exposed to a particular situation was regressed back to that time hypnotically. It is stated that "the subject spontaneously began to perspire and complain of the heat. This was rather surprising in view of the fact that this particular phase of the study took place in winter. The experimenters then recalled that on the day to which the patient was now regressed, Kansas had experienced one of its hottest summer days" (*A Scientific Report on 'the Search for Bridey Murphy'*, Ed. Milton V. Kline, Ph. D., The Julian Press Inc., New York, 1956, p. 185).



## Prior Lives

The majority of these orthodox psychologists and psychiatrists, however, are reluctant to concede that the accounts given of and the experiences lived through alleged prior lives are genuine. In such cases they tend to dismiss these accounts and experiences of prior lives as fantasy or a product of dramatization and role-playing based on material derived from the experiences of this life.. They are prepared to grant that the subject's behaviour "will give the appearance of reincarnation" (F. L. Marcuse, *Hypnosis Fact and Fiction*, Pelican Book, A 446, Reprint 1961, p. 184) but deny that the reincarnationist interpretation is valid.

So the position is that practically all the modern psychologists and psychiatrists are prepared to concede the fact that under age-regression a hypnotised subject will give detailed descriptions of an alleged prior life but would not agree with the validity of a reincarnationist interpretation of the data.

The main reason for this seems to be the logical methodological difficulties involved in accepting an explanation in terms of the hypothesis of rebirth rather than a careful attempt on the part of these psychologists and psychiatrists to understand or explain the data themselves.

In our previous talks, we have tried to show that neither these logical nor methodological difficulties are valid. We pointed out that the concept of rebirth does not lead to contradictions. Even a Positivist philosopher such as Professor A. J. Ayer of Oxford has stated that the concept of rebirth was meaningful. Besides, there is a



growing realisation that the phenomenon of consciousness cannot be explained away purely in terms of physico-chemical phenomena, while the validity of extra-sensory perception requires that psychological explanations be contained (where the data requires this) within the narrow and limiting framework of mechanistic materialist assumptions. The data therefore require to be examined with an open mind.

There have been, however, a few psychiatrists who have accepted the reincarnationist explanation as valid. Dr. Alexander Cannon refers to "one thousand three hundred and eighty-two reincarnation sittings to date" in his book (*The Power Within*, Rider & Co., 6th Impression, 1950, p. 183). His own reactions to these and the final conclusion he came to is summed up in the words: "For years the theory of reincarnation was a nightmare to me and I did my best to disprove it and even argued with my trance subjects to the effect that they were talking nonsense, and yet as the years went by one subject after another told me the same story in spite of different and varied conscious beliefs, in effect until now, well over a thousand cases have been so investigated and I have to admit that there is such a thing as reincarnation". (*Op. cit.*, p. 170)

### **The Evidence**

All-important is the nature of the evidence and its authenticity and the legitimate conclusions that we can come to in explaining this evidence with the help of the various hypotheses that may be adduced to explain it. When hypotheses cannot be accepted or rejected outright, they may be held with varying degrees of probability according to relevant criteria.



One of the earliest recorded experiments of psychologists was that of Professor Theodore Flournoy, Professor of Psychology in the University of Geneva, who experimented with one of his subjects at the end of the last century and recorded the data and findings in a book published in 1899 (*Des Indes a la Planete Mars*, Geneva, 1899).

One of the prior lives of his Swiss subject was as an Arab chief's daughter, who married a Hindu prince about four centuries before. The subject spoke and wrote in the languages (Arabic and Prakrit), which she knew in the regressed state but not in her normal life and gave details of experiences in this life, re-enacting and reliving some of the scenes. The facsimiles of the writing are reproduced in pages 289 and 313 of Flournoy's book.

Before we examine this case, we may turn our attention to a more popular work published in 1942. This would enable us to see the issues involved in the interpretation of the data more clearly. Since Buddhists are or ought to be interested only in objective facts or in "things as they are" (*yathābhūtaṃ*) it is important that we approach the subject with a critical mind without an initial bias for or against the theory of rebirth.

### **"Researches in Reincarnation and Beyond"**

The work is by Rev. A. R. Martin, an ordained teacher of the Coptic Church and is entitled *Researches in Reincarnation and Beyond* (First Ed., Pennsylvania, 1942). It is dedicated to "all seekers for truth whether or not it be in accordance with their former teachings or preconceived ideas"(p. 11). The book records the alleged



experiences of people hypnotised by him or trained to recall their prior lives.

His comments with regard to the evidence and the records are as follows: "The questions and their answers thereto were carefully recorded, usually in shorthand, exactly as given. Great care was taken to ask no 'leading questions', thereby eliminating the possibility of implanting ideas in the mind of the reviewer, thus making certain to bring out only that which was recorded in the reviewer's subconscious mind. These correlations of important persons and events often occurring hundreds of years ago, were carefully checked in reference books, histories, encyclopaedias, etc., and were found correct as given by the reviewer. This information was known to come solely from the knowledge already in the reviewer's subconscious mind, for it was known that such knowledge was not contained in his intellectual mind of this present life" (pp. 7, 8).

He claims that these explorations into the subconscious minds of various people "worked out through powers of mind, absolutely without the use of any kind of drug" was attempted after a group of about twelve persons of various ages had for years examined various conflicting teachings of speculative philosophy on the subject of an after-life and were dissatisfied with them.

The author lists a number of beliefs about the nature of an after-life held by people in the West. The first was that "death ends all . . ." (p. 4), the second that "the consciousness—soul—dies and is buried with the body and remains there until a time called the resurrection when all persons who have ever lived from the beginning of creation to the time of the resurrection will come



forth, from the land or the sea or wherever they may be, to be judged and sent either to an eternal heaven or an eternal hell of fire and brimstone from which there is no escape" (*Ibid.*), the third was the view that there is "an intermediate place of punishment or remorse from which the dead can be released through prayer and liberated into an eternal heaven" . . . (*Ibid.*, pp. 4,5). Several other such views are listed. The author says that he "has lived all of his present life (to this time) in the United States" (p. 3) and was himself "raised to manhood under the instruction of the second belief" (p. 6) and that none of those who thus met regularly to investigate these matters "even 'leaned toward' reincarnation" (p. 6).

If this is so, then considering particularly the fact that no 'leading questions' were asked, it is all the more remarkable that they were able to recall prior lives lived on earth. It is a curious fact, which calls for an explanation by itself, that those who in their normal conscious experience are materialists or theists, who do not believe in pre-existence or rebirth, invariably give alleged accounts of prior lives under deep hypnosis. Where the subject is asked to concoct an account of an alleged 'prior life' this may be attributed to the suggestion of the hypnotist, but where such prior lives are described without any express instructions on the part of the hypnotist to do so, this fact in itself calls for an explanation.

In an article appearing in the magazine "Two Worlds" (H. C. Miranda, *Can Reincarnation be proved by Hypnotism?*, *Two Worlds*, May 1964, pp. 247-249), the writer states :

"Sometimes the subject during what is called 'wakeful state' is not a reincarnationist, or even has never heard about such an idea, or else belongs to a creed that denies it emphatically.



One very intelligent man, a Protestant, asked the hypnotist in a deep, booming, slow voice, 'Why do you ask such a question?'. The question was repeated, 'Were you or were you not born for the first time?'

He still hesitated, as if to conquer a strong inner opposition, and then began to describe his life a couple of centuries ago in a monastery somewhere in Spain.

When he awoke, slowly and by reversing the age-regression process, the tape was played back to him. He was amazed because he did not know about 'reincarnation' and never thought it possible.

A bright, beautiful, mature woman talked freely about reincarnation and other related subjects. When she listened to the playback she said, 'I must be crazy to say such things'. She is a diehard Roman Catholic." (p. 249).

### **Origin of Phobias**

Granted that the experiences related in the above-mentioned book are authentic and factual, many of our problems in this life can be understood in terms of their causal origins in a prior life.

This is very much like the manner in which the submerged traumatic experiences of this life (as explained in Freudian psychology) are the causal factors which account for various symptoms.

Dr. Eysenck records the case of a Mrs. Smith, who suffered from recurrent asthmatic attacks; her work necessitated her going into various hospitals but in doing so she experienced a very strong fear reaction. The sight of a pair of hairy arms or knives also produced such a



reaction. Under hypnotic age-regression, she was able to recall and relive the incidents which were responsible for this condition. It was the shock caused by an operation for mastoidectomy performed on her at the age of sixteen months, which she had forgotten. Dr. Eysenck describes the situation as follows: "During a self-induced trance one day, she was regressed to an early age, when she experienced a previously completely forgotten incident with unusual clarity. She seemed to be lying on a table under brilliant lights. A man was standing beside her holding a small knife. A vague, threatening object was descending from above her head, and settled down over her face. She was terror-stricken and tried to rise, but two hairy arms grabbed her and roughly forced her back. She continued to struggle, but was violently shaken and slapped repeatedly by someone. Finally, the object came down over her face and smothered her. On inquiry, it was found that at the age of sixteen months a mastoidectomy had been performed on her and that she had been very sick afterwards with complications, caused by severe shock" (*Sense and Nonsense in Psychology*, Pelican Book, Reprint, 1961, pp. 51, 52).

The origin of this phobia was traced to a childhood incident in this life. But it is interesting to compare in this connection one of the experiences recorded in the above-mentioned book, which locates the origin of a phobia in an incident of an alleged prior life. It is described as follows: "A middle aged woman . . . when riding in a car driven twenty miles an hour or more, the motion produced such a fear within her that she would become very nervous and ready to jump out of the car. As a result she could ride only in cars driven around



fifteen miles an hour. This fear of speed made it almost impossible for her to travel by train, bus, etc. Upon entering upon a past life review, she found herself to be a young girl travelling on a train with her parents, brothers and sisters. As the train passed over a trestle bridge it was wrecked, killing all the members of the family but herself, along with many others who were on the train. Her injuries were so severe that she was badly crippled and rendered an invalid for the remainder of that life. The speed had been such a dominant factor in this accident and its impression was so deep that the subconscious fixation outmanifested in this life as intense fear whenever any degree of motion was felt by her" (*Op. cit.*, p. 44).

We may recount some of the observations of a like nature made by Dr. Canon on the basis of his case-studies. He says: "The majority of people do not benefit from psycho-analysis because the trauma lies not in this life but in a past life. Let me give you three examples: Mr. A. is a business gentleman of undoubted capabilities, but all his life he has suffered from a phobia or fear of going down in lifts. He is a common-sensed individual and has studied psychology and psychopathology quite seriously and intelligently, and yet he has gained no benefit from it and is at a loss to know why he has this fear of travelling in lifts. Hypnotic experiments reveal that some centuries ago he was a Chinese general who fell from a great height and was accidentally killed. This had resulted in the phobia or fear of descending lifts in this life . . ." (*Op. cit.*, p. 171)



## Karma ?

If the experiences recounted in Rev. Martins' book are authentic and factual, they also appear to throw some light on the operations of *karma*.

In one case five previous lives of a person are recorded. In the fifth life previous to the present, the person's first recollection was that of "awakening as a white baby in a log cabin" (p. 90). The cabin was attacked by Red Indians, one of whom took her along and brought her up as a Red Indian maiden. Eventually, she was taken away by a British trader with whom she lived in a small hut until he decided to leave her and cross the mountains in search of gold. He offered to take her back to the Indian tribe, but conscious of her white parentage and the coming motherhood she refused. Instead, faced with the prospect of being alone in the hut, it is said that she committed suicide by shooting herself on "the right side of her face"

In the very next birth, she is stated to have been born as a crippled child named Sammy, whose entire right side was paralysed. The subsequent birth is supposed to have been as a U. S. soldier of the South during the Revolution, when he was accosted by a British subject who stabbed him in the right side of the abdomen, causing his death.

In the following birth she was born as a girl named Nancy, whose mother worked for a wealthy family. A son of this family, it is said, fell in love with this girl and wanted to marry her but his parents objected and got her married to a farmhand. She subsequently journeyed West in a covered waggon and settled in Illinois, where



two children were born. Nancy died at the age of thirty as a result of abdominal disorders. Her next life was as a person who became well-known as an operatic singer called "Miss Nellie", a daughter of a wealthy family near Baltimore, Maryland. She was happily married but before long her husband was shot dead and it is said that she "died of a broken heart". The author describes and comments on part of her present life as follows: "When she was fifteen years old, the first of these negative conditions resulted in a paralysis of the right side of the face and neck. At this age she knew nothing of reincarnation nor of the influence of past lives upon the present. The overcoming of the paralysis, slight traces of which are still apparent, was accomplished in a period of six to seven years through rest and quiet" (p. 94).

If the facts are as stated, are we to attribute her birth as a child paralysed on the right side in her fourth previous life and her paralysis of the right side of the face and neck in this life as well as, perhaps, her deaths from abdominal injuries or disorders, as karmic consequences of her suicide while being with child in her fifth previous life?

Taken literally if the experiences recounted here are authentic and true records of prior lives, they exemplify the truths of both rebirth and karma. But what justification have we for accepting these experiences at their face value?

### **Normal Hypotheses**

A person with a sceptical frame of mind may very well indulge in doubt and claim that one of several hypotheses other than rebirth could adequately account



for the alleged facts. Some may even doubt whether the book I refer to exists and whether all this is not a concoction of mine! This would be the extreme hypothesis of *Fraud*. The reply to this is that the book is to be found in some libraries, e. g. the library of the University of Ceylon. A less extreme position that one could take would be to doubt whether the author of the book was not merely trying to bring out a sensationalist publication from which he may financially benefit and that the entire account is a concoction of his. One way of verifying this would be to contact the author and through him the people concerned as the author himself wants those interested to do so (see p. 17). But this is unnecessary since this kind of evidence can be made available with the help of a suitable hypnotist and hypnotisable subjects.

Once it is established that the book contains an account of authentic experiences accurately recorded, we may still doubt the assumption that they are genuine memories of past lives. We may try to explain them as being due to the role-playing of the subject, who has proceeded to give dramatised accounts of alleged prior lives on the basis of material drawn from this life. We would then resort to the hypothesis of *Fantasy* or *Self-Deception*, unless the author can prove to us, as he says he could, that "it was known that such knowledge was not contained in his intellectual mind of this present life" (p. 8). This hypothesis would be difficult to exclude in the present circumstance unless it can be shown that specific items of knowledge later verified from encyclopaedias etc. were not known to the subject (as the author claims to be the case.) However, the fact that some of these alleged experiences solved some of the



present psychological problems of some of these subjects is a factor to be taken into consideration in judging the genuineness of these experiences, though this test is by no means conclusive.

Another 'normal' explanation would be to assume that such 'experiences' can be derived genetically from one's ancestors. Apart from the fact that there is no independent evidence of such hereditary derivation of specific 'memory experiences' (leaving out capacities and aptitudes), the hypothesis requires an ancestral link between the two personalities. This is very unlikely at least in those cases in which the prior life is located in such countries as Persia or Egypt.

### **Paranormal Hypotheses**

If the normal hypotheses fail to account for the facts, we have to resort to paranormal hypotheses to explain the evidence.

Granted that the 'memories' correspond with historical facts and knowledge of them is not derived from any experiences in this life, it is possible to suggest that they are the product of a telepathic, clairvoyant or retrocognitive faculty operating along with dramatisation and role-playing. On such hypothesis, these persons did not actually live in the past but acquired information about past events by paranormal or extra-sensory means and dramatised such a past life. Such a hypothesis appears to be more extravagant than a simple hypothesis of 'rebirth'. For, apart from not explaining all the data (e. g. the claim to identity, the serial nature of the recall in age-regression etc.), there is little evidence of such wide and penetrative powers of telepathic,



clairvoyant or retrocognitive perception except, perhaps, in a few extra-ordinary individuals.

For similar reasons, the hypothesis of *Spirit-possession* appears to be less plausible in accounting for the data. For, in spirit-possession, the alleged spirit communicating through the medium claims to be a different person from the personality associated with the body. In the case where a claim to rebirth is made, this is not so.

If a paranormal explanation is to be preferred, 'rebirth', therefore, appears to be more plausible than the others, the data being what it is. But the data presented in Rev. Martin's book do not clearly rule out the possibility of explanation in terms of *Fantasy* or *Self-Deception*, as defined above, unless it can be shown and not merely stated that specific items of knowledge regarding the past were not available to the subject in the course of his present life (for which in this book we have merely to take the author's word). This can be shown to be the case in some of the better documented case-studies, which we shall take up in our subsequent talk.



## VII

# THE CASE FOR THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF SURVIVAL AND KAMMA

## V

We have hitherto examined some of the major problems involved in presenting the case for survival, rebirth and karma. We have also mentioned some of the evidence suggestive of rebirth. It is proposed in this talk to present some typical samples of the authentic evidence available and to indicate some of the conclusions we may draw from them.

As we said earlier, the evidence for rebirth (which is only a special case of re-becoming) falls into three categories: (1) the experimental evidence, (2) the spontaneous evidence and (3) the other evidence.

### **The Experimental Evidence**

We have already given samples of the experimental evidence. In our last talk we gave a brief account of the researches of the Rev. A. R. Martin with his subjects (*Researches in Reincarnation and Beyond*, First Ed., Pennsylvania, 1942), many of whom, it is said, were able to recall specific details of their prior lives although they did not start with any preconceptions, presumptions or prejudices about pre-existence being a fact.

However, one may criticise these experiments as not being conducted under strictly controlled conditions, although the author mentions several precautions he had taken to eliminate subjective bias.



Let us now take examples where the experimental controls appear to have been more satisfactory. In the case investigated by Professor Theodore Flournoy, the account given reads as follows :

“It appeared that Helene Smith had twice lived upon the earth before her present incarnation. Once five hundred years ago as an Arab chief’s daughter who (Simandini by name) became the the favourite wife of a Hindu prince. This prince, Sivrouka, reigned over the kingdom of Kanara, and constructed, in 1401, the fortress of Tchandragiri. This romance was developed with a wealth of detail; and the astonishing features of it were, first, that research in old and little-known books on Indian history confirmed some of the details, such as the names of places and persons described; secondly, that Simandini uttered (in the trance automatisms) many Hindu words and phrases, sometimes appropriately used, sometimes mingled with other words which the experts failed to identify, and wrote also similar phrases in Arabic script. Further, the entranced medium would act the role of Simandini, putting other members of the circle into the vacant places of the drama” (See, William McDougall, *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, Reprint, 1952, p. 511).

In the professor’s own words: “All this various mimicry and this exotic speech have so strongly the marks of originality, of ease, of naturalness, that one asks with stupefaction whence comes to this daughter of Lake Lemman, without artistic training and without special knowledge of the Orient, a perfection of art which the best of actresses might attain only at the cost of prolonged studies or by residence on the banks of the Ganges” (Ibid., pp. 511, 512).



The professor confesses that he has not been able to resolve the mystery, especially the Hindu language and the historical statements about the kingdom of Kanara, which were verified in an old and rare book to which the subject has had no access. Yet he concludes that the "Hindu drama was a subconsciously elaborated fantasy, incorporating very skilfully fragments of knowledge picked up in haphazard fashion. (Ibid., p. 512).

His explanation is the standard explanation resorted to by most orthodox psychologists when confronted with evidence of this sort, namely that here we get only dramatisation and role-playing based on elements of information picked up in this life. Professor Flournoy is, however, constrained to "admit that some knowledge was displayed the acquisition of which by normal means would seem to have been well-nigh impossible" (Ibid., p. 515).

Yet, this does not seem to explain the ease, the spontaneity and accuracy with which she sang Hindi (Prakritic) songs and wrote in a Prakritic script. Nor does it explain the factual information she gave, the claim she made that she was in fact the wife of a Hindu prince in her previous life and the serial account of the life and the incidents she gave.

Let us take another case, the case of Mrs. Anne Baker, reported by Dr. Jonathan Rodney (*Explorations of a Hypnotist*, Elek Books, London, 1955). Mrs. Baker, a Lancashire housewife who has never studied French or been to France and whose education was very ordinary, spoke perfect French under hypnosis, referred to the death of Marie Antoinette as if it had just happened, gave her name as Marielle Pacasse and spoke of a



street named Rue de St. Pierre near the Notre Dame Cathedral.

Subsequent investigations revealed that the name Marielle is rare now but was much in vogue about 1794 and although there was no such street at present, there was in fact a street of that name in that vicinity one hundred and seventy years back (See, pp. 165-66). Here again a normal explanation would not do. Apart from the knowledge of French, one would have to say that the knowledge about the streets of Paris about two centuries back was either acquired clairvoyantly or telepathically from the dead.

An explanation in terms of spirit-possession is also possible though highly improbable. One could say that the discarnate spirit of the dead Marielle Pacasse now inhabits the body of Mrs. Baker. Normally, in the case of spirit-possession, the discarnate spirit claims to be a separate personality and possession is not continuous, whereas in this case whenever Mrs. Baker was hypnotised, she claimed to be Marielle Pacasse in her previous life. So to account for all the facts, 'rebirth' is the simpler paranormal hypothesis.

Another case which cannot pass unnoticed is the famous 'Bridey Murphy' case. When Mrs. Virginia Tighe was hypnotised on six occasions between November 1952 and August 1953, she recalled a life as Bridey Murphy in Ireland. It created a wide interest in 'rebirth'. It will be interesting to see Professor C. J. Ducasse's assessment of the case when it first came into the limelight and later after careful reflection in the light of the verified facts.



In an opinion published in *Tomorrow* (Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 31-33) in 1956 soon after the case became known Professor Ducasse suggests three hypotheses to account for it: "That the former is a reincarnation of the latter is *one* hypothesis that would account for the veridicality of those details. A *second* hypothesis that would also account for their veridicality is that of illusion of memory; that is, the hypothesis that Mrs. Tighe, in childhood or later, heard or read of the life of an Irish Bridey Murphy and then forgot this; and that, under hypnosis, the ideas so acquired were recalled by Mrs. Tighe, but not the manner in which she had acquired them; and hence that they were indistinguishable by her from memories of events of a life of her own. A *third* hypothesis, which would also explain the veridicality of the verified details is that while in deep hypnosis, Mrs. Tighe exercises powers of paranormal retro-cognition latent at other times, and vastly more far-reaching than those whose reality has been experimentally proved by Rhine, Soal, and others". Going on the assumption that Mrs. Tighe's knowledge of Ireland was erroneous (as was thought at the time), Ducasse favoured the *second* hypothesis.

Later, when further investigations vindicated the truth of Mrs. Tighe's statements and the attempts at 'debunking' the 'rebirth'-theory were seen to be mainly inspired by religious prejudice and based on false assertions, Professor Ducasse changed his views and favoured the *first* hypothesis (i. e. rebirth) without ruling out the possibility of the third. He does so in his book, *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life After Death*, Springfield, Illinois, 1961.

Here he refers to the items mentioned by Bridey, which could not be easily explained away. One of the



most significant was that in her previous life she bought foodstuffs from Farris and John Carrigan. Extensive research on the part of Mr. John Bebbington, Belfast Chief Librarian, disclosed the fact that these two grocers were found listed in a Belfast city directory for 1865-66. Bridey died in 1864. Besides, they were "the only individuals of those names engaged in the 'foodstuffs business' there at the time.

Bridey also referred to a rope company and a tobacco house, which were in operation in Belfast at the time and this too was found to be correct. Another remarkable fact was that Bridey's statements, which according to experts on Ireland were irreconcilable with known facts, were shown after further investigation not to be so. Ten such facts are listed. To take one example, one of Bridey's statements was to the effect that her husband taught law at the Queen's University in Belfast sometime after 1847. *Life Magazine*, on the basis of so-called expert opinion, attacked this on the ground that there was no law school there at the time, no Queens College until 1849 and no Queen's University until 1908. However, further investigations showed that this was incorrect. There was documentary evidence to show that on December 19, 1845, Queen Victoria ordained that "there shall and may be erected . . . one College for students in Arts, Law, Physic . . . which shall be called Queen's College, Belfast" (Op. cit., p. 286). "The Queen's University in Ireland" was founded by her on August 15, 1850 (Ibid.).

Such accuracy may be due to either extra-ordinary clairvoyant powers on the part of the subject or to the simple fact that these were genuine memories of her past



life. Since she did not display any such clairvoyant powers in other respects during hypnosis, the latter appears to be the more plausible explanation.

### **Spontaneous Evidence**

The spontaneous evidence consists of accounts given by individuals, mostly children, of their alleged prior lives, which when subsequently checked prove to be historical and accurate and could not have been derived from any normal source in this life.

There are several such cases from all over the world and reports of them are to be found in newspapers and magazines. But in coming to valid conclusions on their basis one has to rely on the trustworthy verified accounts of scientists. The evidence should be first recorded without bias and one should then see what theory best accounts for the data.

In this respect, one of the best studies so far is that of Dr. Ian Stevenson, Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Virginia. He makes a detailed study and evaluation of twenty cases in one of his books (*Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, New York, 1966, pp. x plus 362).

Let us briefly review the case of Imad Elawar, as studied and reported in this book. Imad was born on December 21, 1958 at Kornayel and talked of a previous life when he was between a year and a half and two years old. He mentioned a considerable number of names of people and some of events in this prior life as well as about certain items of property he claimed to have owned. He said he lived in the village of Khriby and had the name



Bouhamzy. He had a woman (mistress) called Jamille, who was beautiful and a 'brother' called Amin, who lived at Tripoli etc., etc.

The father, however, discredited the story and scolded Imad for talking about an imaginary past life. Once, it is said, he even recognised a resident (Salim el Aschkar) of Khriby in the presence of his paternal grandmother. The parents attached more importance to Imad's statements after this. But no systematic attempts to verify the authenticity of Imad's statements were made until Dr. Ian Stevenson undertook to investigate the case.

Khriby was situated about 25 miles away from Imad's home. The road from Kornayel was an extremely winding mountain road. The items were carefully recorded prior to the investigations at Khriby. It was ultimately revealed that of the fifty seven items mentioned, fifty one were correct. In Dr. Stevenson's own words: "Of the fifty seven items in the first tabulation, Imad made ten of the statements in the car on the way to Khriby, nearly all on the first visit to Khriby before we reached that village. But of these ten, three were incorrect. Of the remaining forty seven items, Imad was wrong on only three items. It seems quite possible that under the excitement of the journey, and perhaps sensing some expectation of hearing more statements on our part, he mixed up images of the 'previous life' and memories of his 'present life'. In any case, his 'score' for this group of statements definitely fell below that for the forty-seven made before we left Khriby" (Op. cit., pp. 257-271).



Some of the items were very specific as when he said that they were building a new garden at the time of his death and that there were cherry and apple trees in it, that he had a small yellow automobile, a bus etc.

Besides the verification of these items of information, there were significant recognitions of persons and places, sixteen of which are listed. For example, we may note the recognition of the place where Ibrahim Bouhamzy (the previous personality) kept his dog and his gun. He also recognised the sister of Ibrahim, namely Huda and the portrait of Ibrahim's brother Fuad. He was also able, it is said, to recall his last words before death, which his sister, Mrs. Huda Bouhamzy, remembered and which were, 'Huda, call Fuad'.

When we consider the above as well as the similarity in the character traits between the previous and the present personalities, chance-coincidence has to be virtually ruled out. Since neither Fraud, Self-Deception or Racial Memory could account for the evidence, a paranormal explanation is called for. And of all the different paranormal explanations, such as telepathy-cum-clairvoyance plus personation, spirit-possession etc., rebirth appears to be the most plausible. This was, in fact, Dr. Stevenson's own general conclusion after studying several cases of this type.

In the spontaneous case there is no hypnotist to put any suggestions into the mind of the child. We may say, however, that the child's beliefs about a prior life are a product of his fantasy. But such an explanation ceases to be plausible in the above instances, when the so-called 'fantasies' turn out to be historically true and they were not derived from any source in this life.



## The Evidence

We have already referred to other evidence for rebirth when we tried to suggest that temperamental differences in identical twins, which cannot be due to heredity and environment, may be accounted for in terms of the impact of the psychological past of the person, which goes back into prior lives. We have also seen how some phobias prevalent in this life have not only been traced to traumatic experiences in prior lives but have been cured by re-living the experience and discovering the origin of it.

Although it is possible to give other explanations of the so-called *deja vu* experiences, the experience of feeling 'I have been here before', some of them, at least, seem to point to or call for an explanation in terms of pre-existence. There is a recorded case of an American couple, who found that some parts of Bombay were extremely familiar to them, despite the fact that they were visiting the place for the first time. To test their knowledge, it is said, they went to a certain spot, where they expected to see a house and a banyan tree in the garden. They, however, did not find them but were told by a policeman in the vicinity that he recalled having heard from his father that they had been there and that the house belonged to a family named Bhan. Curiously, this couple had called their son Bhan, because they liked the name. (W. C. White, "Cruise Memory", *Beyond the Five Senses*, ed. E. J. Garrett, J. B. Lipincott, New York, 1957; cited by Dr. Stevenson). Such stories are, however, anecdotal and one cannot attach much importance to them. They are of value only when one is certain of their authenticity.



Dr. Raynor C. Johnson, M. A. (Oxon), Ph. D., D. Sc. (Lond.), Master of Queen's College, University of Melbourne, suggests that certain recurrent dreams may be memories of experiences had in prior lives (see, *A Religious Outlook for Modern Man*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1963, pp. 184 ff). A brief excerpt from an account of one such dream reads as follows :

"The dream was of being a prisoner in a place that I knew to be the Tower of London. I had not seen it in real life, but I had no doubt where it was. It was very cold weather (in waking life, a hot summer). I was aware that I had been condemned to death . . . This I used to dream over and over again, and after being in the dream a vigorous man, to wake up and be a little girl felt rather strange. At last the dream changed, and I was standing on a scaffold which must have been newly erected as it smelt of sawdust. Everything was decorous and decent. The executioner knelt and apologised for what he was about to do. I took the axe from his hand and felt it, and handed it back, bidding him do his duty . . . When I woke up I made a drawing of the axe, which was of a peculiar shape. Some time after this I asked to be taken to the Tower of London, and I explained to a friendly gunsmith that I wanted to write history but could not understand the battles perfectly until I understood the weapons. 'You are right, Missy', he said, and demonstrated to me the various uses of pike, lance, crossbow etc. I then asked had he an axe that beheaded people? He said, 'Yes, this certainly beheaded the Jacobite Lords, but it is supposed to be very much older'. Somehow, I was not surprised that it proved to be the exact shape of the axe in my dream . . ." (Op. cit., pp. 184, 185).



Here again we can suggest that this is not the only explanation possible but when we read about several such dreams one begins to wonder whether they are not a hang-over from one's past-life experiences.

We have further evidence for rebirth from clairvoyants. The best attested case in the twentieth century is that of Mr. Edgar Cayce. A general account of his life and doings is to be found in a book by Dr. Gina Cerminara (*Many Mansions*, William Sloane Associates, New York, Twelfth Printing 1960, pp. 304).

There is good evidence that Cayce had remarkable clairvoyant powers, with which he successfully diagnosed illnesses even without actually seeing the patient. But what is more remarkable is that he went on to give accounts of the prior lives of some of these individuals (some of which were historically verified). He also gave the alleged karmic causes of their present illnesses.

We have already seen how suicide had certain karmic effects in subsequent lives. Cayce in his readings (which are still preserved and are available for study at the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Virginia Beach, U. S. A.) records the different kinds of karmic effects following in the wake of the different kinds of actions done in the past. In one case, it is said, a person was born blind in this life because in his third life previous to this, *circa* 1000 B. C., he was born in Persia as "a member of a barbaric tribe whose custom was to blind its enemies with red-hot irons, and it had been his office to do the blinding" (Op. cit., pp. 50, 51).





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